THE MAGAZINE OF
Fantasy and Science Fiction
OCTOBER
WARD MOORE
WILLIAM MORRISON
Chesley Bonestell
ROBERT SHECKLEY
LORD DUNSANY

THE MAGAZINE OF

# Fantasy and Science Fiction

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*Cover by Chesley Bonestell (Rocket-testing base on the moon)*

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*Ward Moore's* Lot *(F&SF, May, 1953) has received an unusual amount of acclaim even for a story from a writer as talented as Moore. Your letters awarded it Third Prize in our contest to determine your favorite stories of 1953; most critics have singled it out for special praise in our* BEST FROM F&SF: THIRD SERIES; *and next month it will appear again in Bleiler and Dikty's* BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES: 1954. *The reason, I think, is that Mr. Moore gave to a familiar but still potent theme (survival after atomic devastation) a depth of psychological reality which it had never before received; and now he continues this profoundly real treatment in a sequel which intensifies the effect of the original while standing on its own as a story of character in a future which is — God help us! — never too far from our thoughts in these times.*

# *Lot's Daughter*

*by* WARD MOORE

ILLUSTRATION BY KELLY FREAS

MR. JIMMON PUT a finger tenderly against an upper molar. It did not ache yet, but he knew the signs, felt the pain waves still of too high a frequency for translation into sensation. Tomorrow he would be in agony, and for days afterward. Then the pain would go; six months or a year later the gray, porous shell would work loose and drop out. It had happened several times in the six years — Mr. Jimmon was pretty sure it was six years, not seven — since . . . Mr. Jimmon didn't care to finish the sentence, even mentally, for he was a man who shrank from the too-dramatic, the over-romantic. And if you did not stop short you would have to conclude: since the End of Civilization, or since we Fled the Holocaust, or since Man Decided on Suicide. All capitalized. Theatrical, even if accurate.

Should've had them all extracted, he thought as he had thought so often. And appendix. Apprehension projected a detailed picture of unendurable pain while Erika stood by helpless to ease him. As he had stood by when . . .

But that was natural, in the course of nature, he objected. Bring forth your young in labor; rationalization from observation, transferred to a supernatural command. No prophet ever got a revelation reading: Thou shalt die miserably of an inflamed bowel.

"If you expect to eat, you better get up now."

Erika's voice was matter-of-fact, emotionless. She was not nagging him at the moment; she did not condemn his idleness, she stated the incontrovertible. He who doesn't work won't eat. In a dead world the cliché was immortally triumphant.

"You hear me, Dad?"

"Heard you," said Mr. Jimmon.

He tried to shut his ears against the sounds of her moving about, and the boy's "I want something to eat," as he shut his eyes to the dawn light. He was not sleepy, not tired even; he just didn't want to leave his bed. Hadn't wanted to for the last few days, in fact; his habitual energy and determination seemed to have slipped away. Perhaps it had been going for a long time.

Certainly the pile of dry grass on which he was lying was no snugly comfortable couch. There were stiff, thick weeds mixed through it, and the grass itself was matted in spots as though it had not been properly dried out. She had been careless in curing it again.

"Heard you," he repeated.

Long ago he'd decided they dare not keep food anywhere near the shelter lest it attract predators. Each day's provision must be sought afresh except on the rare occasions when he succeeded in shooting a large animal. They gambled then, gorging; using the meat up faster than they need have, listening for the soft padding or inquisitive snuffle of carnivores.

"Dad!"

Nagging now. "I'm getting another bad tooth," he stated, staring upward. There was no question; he could see the light coming through the roof in several places. The next rain would sluice in as though there were nothing to stop it. For the hundredth — or five hundredth — time he decided he ought to do something drastic about putting a real roof on the shelter. Have done with the makeshift of branches and thatch and soil. Get boards. Real boards, from the nearest house. Five miles. Ten trips, twenty trips . . . 100 miles. He was easily capable of walking 100 miles, 50 of them burdened with lumber. But for what? A hundred miles for a tight roof; was it worth it now that all the stuff that could be ruined by rain had already been watersoaked?

"Well. This time I certainly hope you'll let me knock it out with a nail before you waste weeks moaning over it."

Mr. Jimmon shook his head silently. He was not afraid of the pain. Or even revolted by the savagery of putting a large nail against the aching tooth and giving it a sharp blow with the hammer. The shudder induced was at pictures of choking to death on the dislodged tooth or the awful realization of a broken jaw.

"It's the diet," he muttered. "No bones or gristle. Even crusty bread."

A hundred miles. If he could jump into the station wagon, explore till he found exactly what he wanted, load up and come back. If. No use dwelling on the tragedy of that immobilization.

"If you ever got up early the way you used to, you might get a deer or a rabbit; they feed at dawn. And if you walked a few miles you could kill a cow again."

He covered his eyes with his hands. "No cattle left. Either drifted away or just haven't adapted."

"More likely somebody's got them herded."

Mr. Jimmon sighed; it was the old argument. "Don't you suppose we'd have seen some sign of this enterprising, mythical character? The one who not only herds cows but rigs up gadgets and has machinery working. And what about the dogs he must have tamed; why haven't we heard the barking or noticed them sniffing around?"

"You've been too busy hiding to notice anything."

"A smart man hides from savages until the savages kill each other off or until he has some means of subduing them."

"You have no way of knowing that what you thought was going to happen before we left Malibu has actually happened."

"I was right about other things: the panic, the crowded highways, the extortion for gasoline, the destruction. Why should I suddenly be wrong?"

"But you don't *know*. And you don't want to find out."

The fixed notion that there could be numbers going about their business as though It had never happened could become irritating. Probably fostered by concern for the boy; he remembered no such obstinacy on her part before he was born. During those frightening months her need for others had been imperative enough to induce a desperate faith in the existence of survivors. Civilized survivors like themselves trying mightily not to relapse. A faith against all reason.

"Be logical, Erika. Visualize the probabilities. First the destruction of the cities. How many died instantly? Ten million? Twenty million? Thirty million?" He began to feel some relish for the discussion, in displaying his own smooth reasoning even though he was merely repeating what he'd said so often. "Be conservative: say twenty million."

"That's only a guess. The radio never gave out figures."

"It's a logical guess, and the radio's reticence is one of the factors in the logic. But the initial destruction was only the beginning. Radiation sickness; doesn't show up right away. And disease, spread by refugees; epidemics. Filth-borne plagues, polluted water on top of malnutrition. Another thirty million anyway. Fifty million, third of the population, from

only primary effects. Then crop failures. Industrial farming couldn't survive; gasoline shortage, no manpower, breakdown of equipment. Shrinking markets; lack of transportation. In the West, end of irrigation. New malnutrition, second wave of epidemics. Deaths from starvation, from rioting between the late city-folks and the farmers. Murder. Fighting for women. Gang wars. Floods and disasters due to the disappearance of government services, and a third wave of epidemics after them. Your remnant: two or three million, widely scattered in disorganized, roving bands."

"That's only the way you see it. People don't turn into savages overnight just to fit a theory —"

"No." Mr. Jimmon could not resist the opening. "They're savages already. Disruption cracks off the surface hiding the savagery underneath."

She tossed her head. "People have an instinct for cooperation; I bet it's stronger than the savagery you're always expecting. Because savagery means less food and comfort in a short time, no matter how it pays off for a moment. People aren't as stupid as you think they are; they must have organized ways of stopping the epidemics, raised food even if they had to use hoes and horses, done all kinds of things to get started again."

He removed the cowhide that served him as a blanket, with distaste. It stank worse daily. It would soon have to be discarded, though it was the closest he had come to tanning leather successfully. "Faith," he said. "Pure, blind faith. Baseless."

"We survived, didn't we? Then there are others."

"We aren't herding cattle," he pointed out. "And we have advantages others lack."

"Have we? Is that why we live like this?"

"Better to live like this than not at all." He rose from the mattress. A pair of shorts, already worn frail, had been inexpertly improvised by Erika from the last of his pajamas. When they were gone he would have to suffer the harshness of ill-cured leather to chafe his flesh.

"We don't have to live like this," she said flatly. "Somewhere — not too far away, even — people must be living decently."

"Faith," he repeated; "faith. Wood on the fire? Don't want to have to start a new one."

"There's wood on the fire," said Erika. "And hot water."

The goatskin pants and jacket were as crudely fashioned as the shorts — more so perhaps, since the material was harder to work. The hair had come off in mangy patches; the hide beneath was rough and stiff, not soft and supple as it should have been. Only the sandals came anywhere near being satisfactory. Mr. Jimmon didn't know what had made their deerskin thongs flexible and free from decay; the hide from which he'd cut them rotted like

all the others. They held the soles, made from a tire — the one punctured on the last miles of the trip and left on the spare wheel instead of being repaired at all costs in time or money — firmly and comfortably against his feet, so that he could run, if need be, as easily as in the boots or shoes, now worn out and discarded.

Dressed, he rubbed the back of his hand against his jaw. "Shaving day again," he muttered.

"I want something to eat," whined the boy.

"Dad will take care of it," said Erika. "In good time."

"Wonder," reflected Mr. Jimmon. "Would it really be too late to make some sort of calendar? Guess at the date? May or June. And keep it up from now on?"

Erika paused in her activity. (What *does* she find to keep busy with, he wondered. Women's work is never done — but what do they do without vacuum cleaners and other labor-saving devices to keep them occupied?) "What would be the good? As soon as we come across people who haven't gone native we'll find out the real date."

He got out the straight-edged razor. Forethought. Safety blades would have long since blunted into worthlessness. He stropped it tenderly, unskilfully. "What is a 'real date'? A convention agreed on by civilized communities. What civilized communities are there to agree to conventions?"

"Enough," she answered. "If we were to look for them."

"Want something to eat," repeated the boy.

Razor in hand, Mr. Jimmon walked from the shelter to the flat stones that served as fireplace a few feet beyond. Lifting the blackened kettle off the coals he kicked the fire-eaten boughs together before settling it back in place. He dipped a stiff rag into the hot water, watching it go limp, and swathed it around his jowls.

"Aaaah," he murmured luxuriously. "Ummmm."

Soap. Not hard to make; he'd explained the theory to Erika often enough. You rendered fat or tallow and mixed it with sifted wood ashes. There were always plenty of ashes and he did succeed now and then in shooting an animal. Still they had no soap. The decencies of life slipping away. Daren't let down too far.

He shaved slowly and carefully before the rear-view mirror from the station wagon. The hot water softened the gray and white hairs enough to permit cutting without scraping the skin raw, but it was still painful. "Ought to make soap," he muttered.

The boy had followed him outside and was watching intently. "Dad," he said, not asking, just idly stating. Mr. Jimmon felt the obligation to reply but found no ready words. He turned his face slightly away, in the direc-

tion of the brook delicately winding between the trees. It was normally so shallow that dipping water from it was a nuisance. A little farther upstream was a natural basin; he had intended to dam it ever since they came to the end of their flight here.

He wiped the razor thoroughly dry on the sleeve of his jacket and put it down on a rock. "You going to need this warm water any more?" he called to Erika.

She came to the opening of the shelter, her blonde hair unevenly streaked with sunburn and drawn tightly back from her forehead. The line of her jaw from ear to chin was delicately firm. Caught unexpectedly, Mr. Jimmon looked full at her before dropping his eyes.

The top of a dress of Molly's was tucked into a pair of levis, also Molly's. She was thin — slender was perhaps the better word — but not over-thin, like her mother. On a good diet she might even fill out the slight hollows in her cheeks. Perhaps not; there was an intensity about Erika, emphasized in her eyes, that indicated a tendency to spareness.

Six years, seven years; he couldn't say to her, How old are you now, Erika, twenty, twenty-one? The time had been longer for her than for him, much longer. One of the reasons she clung to the fantasy of civilized survivors. Hopeless, dreary otherwise. And what did he cling to? Daily food-getting. Hanging on.

"What am I supposed to do with it? Do the dishes we didn't bring along because you wouldn't burden yourself with things? Wash the clothes we don't have any more? Mop the dirt floor? Sterilize something?"

He had sterilized the knife with which she'd cut the cord. "All right. All right. I only asked."

He took up the kettle by the bailer and emptied it. Aluminum, even heavy cast aluminum like this, was going to wear out soon. He remembered how he'd debated between it and a cast iron one. A single mishap with cast iron, one drop on a sharp rock and . . . The aluminum, even if it developed a pinhole or two, would still be useful. Despite her unjust taunts about dishes and the dirt floor (how did one go about making concrete if there were no bags of cement to be bought?) he had foreseen intelligently.

Must be close to 7 already. If his watch hadn't stopped permanently. Moisture-proof; return to manufacturer. Hers had lasted nearly a year longer, though it had been little more than an ornament. Its sole function now; she wore it sometimes as jewelry. Her only trinket. (Molly had never been one of those gem-loving women, give her her due.) Remind her not to leave it hanging up in plain sight like that.

Time to eat; was he really hungry? Or habit? If it were possible to eat breakfast now, instead of just the first meal of the day. Real breakfast.

Chilled grapefruit with a maraschino cherry in the center. Cornflakes and cream with sugar. Sugar. Bacon and eggs; eggs fresh from a domestic hen in a commercial henhouse, not gulls' like Erika sometimes found. And . . .

Six years since the smell of coffee last stung his nostrils. Nevertheless his taste buds responded to the memory and his mouth watered. "Wonder," he said aloud.

"What?"

She was still standing in the doorway. Opening, really; it couldn't be called a doorway since it was only the place where he had not built the wall. Before the rains came he must make it into a genuine doorway, perhaps even provide a door of some sort. No real reason to reproach himself for having been too busy to do it before, rather stress what he had accomplished. No need to be ashamed of the shelter's smallness, meanness, inadequacy; how many other civilized men without training, preparation or experience — or even for that matter, taste for it (he recalled Molly's contemptuous, "You were never the rugged, outdoor type, David,") — could have done as well?

"Few," he muttered.

He became conscious of her look. "Are you going to go after food, or stand there talking to yourself? It's getting to be a habit."

"Um. Might go after rabbits."

Her derisive glance was not totally unkind. "That case I'll go down to the ocean and see what I can find."

He followed her through the unfinished wall. To one side the seats from the station wagon served as beds for her and the boy; his own grass pallet was opposite. From the ingenious concealment of a length of bark fastened to the true wall he drew out the rifle swathed in rags.

"Thought you said rabbits."

"Mmm." For a moment, holding one hand on the stock, the other on the barrel, he indulged the fantasy of coming suddenly on a deer and dropping it with a cool shot. Too late in the day, though of course it was always possible to be lucky. He smiled wryly as he replaced the rifle.

"All right." He reached under the seat and drew out another bundle.

He broke open the shotgun. The bore looked clean; he poked a rag through it anyway. The ammunition was concealed in several caches; even if two or three were discovered he wouldn't be stripped clean. Shells and cartridges were not intermixed; finding a cache of one wouldn't lead intruders to search for the other weapon. Always one jump ahead of the looters. You had to be.

"We're going now, Dad."

"All right. Maybe I'll get something." Was he merely obstinate in starting off to hunt when experience had shown the only sure way to get food was from the ocean? He selected six shells, letting his fingers fondle them briefly, putting one in the breech of the shotgun. From still another hiding place he retrieved the briefcase. It had been ancient when he discarded it many years ago, an old-fashioned zipperless impediment with a handle, straps, and cranky lock. How it got packed among articles which had been so carefully chosen was an ironical mystery. Ironical, because the obsolete pouch had proved much more valuable than so much he had then thought essential, like the rain-ruined government pamphlets or the never-planted seeds.

He slipped the rawhide strips attached to the handle over his shoulder, put the other five shells, his knife, and flint in the case, and tied the substitute straps. Man the survivor went forth to hunt dangling a briefcase.

The dull, high fog was chilly. If he knew how to make mortar without cement he could have built a fireplace inside the shelter. Warm. Cozy. Cook in the rain. Shelter, they called it honestly; neither would say it was anything more.

The never-accounted-for pile of logs, all roughly of a size, had arbitrarily determined the site when he and Erika had come upon it at the end of the flight. If either of them had been inclined to superstition (some of his old

paternal pride in her warmed fleetingly) they might have taken it as some kind of sign. He had laboriously felled and cut and trimmed an equal number to make the three and a half walls. Neither smooth nor snug nor square. The logs had looked so true it hadn't seemed possible they could fail to fit neatly together like children's blocks. But when one was laid on another after the ends were notched to interlock, the unnoticed swellings around the knots, the faint twists and curves, made large uneven gaps.

He'd known what to do: one filled the chinks with moss, and daubed heavy mud in and over the cracks to make a tight surface. Unfortunately the moss always dried up and blew away, the sandy mud refused to cling and dropped off persistently as it was applied. In the end Erika had stuffed in grass; as the logs weathered and shrank she used more grass.

He followed the stream upward for a short distance, then struck eastward between the redwoods. People who used to write stories about what would happen instinctively agreed with Erika, leaping for shock-cushioning fancies. Like living in deserted mansions, enjoying unlimited supplies of canned goods from abandoned markets, banding together with like-minded survivors — one of them always a reservoir of esoteric knowledge about the economy of the American Indian, agronomic chemistry, textile manufacture — to rebuild civilization. Limited imagination, unable to envisage realities.

After they had arrived ("Any further will be too close to Monterey . . .") and hidden the station wagon, obliterating the tire-marks for the half mile from the highway, they listened daily to the car's radio. Months earlier he had told them just what was bound to occur after It happened. Molly — he barely stopped himself thinking poor Molly — had been so incredulous, even when they were fighting the rest of the refugee traffic to escape, but the announcer sounded as though he were repeating what Mr. Jimmon had said in their living room. Erika never remembered the accuracy of his predictions now.

The redwoods gave place to live oak, pine and some trees he had not been able to identify. Then the growth ended abruptly on the edge of rolling hills where the grass had barely begun to fade. Had he been wrong in not trying to corral some of the cattle then roaming here? The overwhelming difficulties of catching, herding, penning, caring for them came back to impress him anew. He had done the only feasible thing: shot those he could, one at a time. (Erika's sneer at pioneers who shot cows was unjust; she ate her share of the meat.) Now they'd disappeared. All.

As Erika thought, into a herd salvaged by someone interested in more than today's loot and food? The news they listened to so raptly denied the likelihood. The gutted, uninhabitable shell of Los Angeles had become a

trap; not only radiation sickness, but typhoid, meningitis, unnamed plagues — Mr. Jimmon wouldn't have been surprised if one were cholera — swirled among those not in the first wave of escapers. Following the earlier fugitives they brought their sores and lesions to attack a surrounding population already disorganized and hungry. The attempt to set up dislocation camps ended when the national guardsmen were massacred by the frenzied victims.

The radio had been detailed and explicit about destruction in Europe and Asia. ("Eleven classified bombs destroyed Leningrad last night. . . ." "Nothing remains of Marseilles except . . ." "While Copenhagen and Bristol were being reduced, Archangel and Warsaw . . .") News of disaster at home had to be deduced from grudging hints. Chicago and Detroit were hit the same day; the destruction of New York had gone on interminably. One had to piece the cautious items together to begin to understand.

It must be a couple of years since he'd seen any cattle. Miles away, how many he could only guess, were ranch house, stables, corrals, outbuildings. Beyond them were thousands of other grazing acres. The heroic fictional man (*homo gernsbacchae*) would have found the house, rounded up the cattle, started all over.

And been a fine target for the first passing looters.

When San Francisco went there had been ways of estimating the extent of disaster. Normally bare State Highway 1 suddenly became burdened with southbound traffic. He had been sure their hideout would be invaded and overrun, but motorists apparently thought only of getting as far away as possible. What would they do after another hundred miles, when they came within the radius of devastation made by those escaping from Los Angeles? Turn for the Pacific like lemmings?

The radio could get only one station after that. For perhaps a month they heard from Monterey that disaster was being coped with; it would be no time before complete network service was restored; meanwhile the civilian population was not to panic or heed enemy-spread rumors. Tabulation of dislocated persons was going on rapidly; lost friends and relatives were being listed; reunion would be sped by calmness and fortitude.

Something moved in the grass to his right. A rabbit? Wildcat? The breeze? Standing still, he raised the shotgun level with his hip. There was no further movement. Wariness? Illusion?

Keeping the gun firmly at the ready, he moved one foot ahead of the other. The grass was tall; it was barely possible some large, dangerous animal crouched, waiting to spring. His eyes strained ahead to locate the exact spot, to fire at the betraying sign. He lifted his left foot, set it down silently, lifted the right.

He was thus off-balance for a fraction of a second when the largest jackrabbit he'd ever seen bounded out of the grass in frantic hops. Even as he brought the shotgun to his shoulder he knew he couldn't possibly hit the leaping creature. Stumbling, he willed his finger to relax on the trigger, but it was too late. He fell heavily, sprawling; the gun roared next to his ear, at the same time he felt the briefcase twist and break open.

The grass was not yet dry enough to be brittle; for a long moment he lay where he'd fallen, unwilling to struggle. Another irreplaceable shell wasted, another simple task bungled.

Mr. Jimmon lay quietly, thinking. Civilization, no matter how you defined it, was a delicate, interdependent mechanism. Suppose he had been, not an insurance broker but an Admirable Jimmon, the Elizabethan universal man born out of time: crack shot, firstclass woodsman, mechanic, improviser, chemist, physicist, farmer. Would anything have been qualitatively different? Wasn't it an imperative that all men had to sink to a common level before there could be a new raising? To believe as he had believed, or thought he believed, that it was possible to preserve in himself and Erika — and the boy? that was a nice question — an isolated vestige of the decencies, amenities, attitudes, techniques of mid-Twentieth Century life without a supporting network of goods and services, mines and factories, was a delusion. A remnant of the primitive idea that man could get help from spirits or a watchful god to overcome obstacles, as though man had anything to depend on but mankind. If mankind sank, man sank with it; the variations in depth were insignificant.

He had known this all along; they had all known it all along. Wendell had asked promptly, "You mean we can steal cars and things?" All collapse was total collapse. Hiding from the looters and rapists — the rebuilders of tomorrow — did not preserve an enclave from a lost world, it merely kept the present one a little more, an infinitesimally little more, brutal than it might have been.

He sighed and picked himself up. Another shell wasted, another step closer to the moment when he would have no shotgun, no weapon at all except the two bows and arrows. Even on the terms he had originally imagined saving himself and Erika he was failing; each wasted shell narrowed the gap between them and other survivors.

The briefcase . . . ? He looked down; it lay on the grass, shoulderstrap and jury-straps broken through. He picked it up; the knife and flint were inside, the shells were spilled around.

Four of them. The fifth must have bounced out, it could not be far away. Methodically, tenderly he put everything back in; careful not to move his feet he searched for the missing shell. It must not be lost.

Priceless artifact of brass and copper and paper, lead and gunpowder. A halfwit, an idiot who could no more understand an actuarial table than the second law of thermodynamics or the tactics of the battle of Salamis, could refill the ejected shells with some sort of makeshift (what was gunpowder? saltpeter and . . . ?) and preserve his shorter distance from the bow-and-arrow users that much longer. The halfwit would do it in order to blow out the brains of some other savage who had a hide or a piece of meat or a woman he coveted. Whereas the man who took thought for tomorrow was unable to safeguard the heritage of yesterday.

He squatted on his heels, splaying his fingers through the grass. Give it up? Write off two shells on the jackrabbit? Accept the double, no, triple loss?

"Got to find it."

Boxes and boxes of shells lined the shelves of hardware stores in a hundred towns and villages. Except that they no longer did. If he had not been forethoughtful, provident, he too might have all the weapons and ammunition he needed for the taking. He had been too quick, too intelligent to survive.

Staring down into the grass, he stared back into the past. The vitality he'd had when he and Molly, Jir, Erika, and Wendell had started off in the station wagon, gaining new force with the sloughing off of Molly and the boys, reaching its peak with the attainment of the hiding place and the almost mystic propriety of the relationship with Erika, had really seemed to change him from man the commuter and taxpayer to man the lair finder, man the dwelling maker, man the provider. How long had this impetus lasted? A few months? Less than a year, certainly; it was long gone before Erika found herself with child.

It had begun to fade when Monterey went off the air; perhaps with the final realization that there was no longer any faint hope something would be spared, that he was truly on his own now. What had happened to Monterey? Or, for that matter, to Salinas and Carmel and Fort Ord? There had been no bombing; they were close enough to have seen the flash. Besides, long before actual transmission ceased he'd had the queer feeling the broadcast was . . . *hollow*. A one-man operation perhaps (was that possible?), from a ghost town. A madman pretending that the little city still existed, that people walked its streets, patronized its stores, rode its busses, slept in its beds, docked ships at its wharves. The local news might have been true; it might equally well have been fiction. No hint of an exodus was given but no voice other than the announcer's was heard relaying world news (how did it come in? was it true? its vagueness was equally characteristic of genuineness or falsity) and government directives, some of them recognizably months old. Then one day no call letters were transmitted; there was no

scratched record of the anthem, no news, no hearty signing off. Nothing but silence that day. And the next. And the next.

Had the power failed? Or the engineer finally given up his deception — if it was? Or succumbed to illness? Erika impulsively had wanted him to drive the station wagon north and find out. Her childish obstinacy had ignored his adult reasoning; for the first time he saw signs in her of her mother's blindness to facts. She could not argue with his deduction of the dangers, she merely repeated that they ought to get in the car and see for themselves.

Even when he pointed out that they no longer had a spare tire she perversely turned the situation around: All the more reason; they could find a way of fixing it there. He'd been appalled — no other word fitted — appalled at her unrealistic attitude.

He had not understood how strong her obsession with the idea of a makeshift residuary civilization had grown until he discovered she'd been turning the radio on four or five times a day. "Don't you realize you're draining the battery?"

She had answered carelessly, "Oh, we can always start the motor and run it up again."

He'd tried to make her understand, to see the picture whole. About two gallons left in the gas tank. Vital for an emergency; irreplaceable. (On her terms, supposing her daydream true, he had no money to buy gas; he'd given the entire contents of his wallet, the 200 hundred-dollar bills, to Molly in that final gesture. And since her daydream was illusion there was no gas to be had anyway.)

He had known wry triumph when the battery finally failed and the radio no longer sucked in empty static. The station wagon had become a useless relic. "But we can push it and start the motor that way. Of course if you'd done as I wanted . . ."

Push the inert monster over half a mile of trackless, bumpy ground, obstructed with fallen boughs and rotted stumps. Impossible. Difficult even for five or six husky men. Out of the question. "Besides, the tires are soft."

Her answer had been to pump up all four with the hand pump. He felt both admiration and irritation; perseverance in a stupid cause. Naturally they couldn't budge the wagon over the first hump (he had not held back an ounce of effort, even knowing the futility of it). She had not been stopped by the failure; somewhere she'd heard of starting a car by jacking up a rear wheel and spinning it while in gear.

For months it had stayed petrified in that canine position. He had given up as soon as he realized it wouldn't work, but she spent hours vainly twirling. It was a long time before her thrice daily attempts became daily, and the

daily weekly. If he remembered, her pregnancy was well advanced before she gave up entirely.

"No salvation by mechanical means," he muttered. Only by dogged reliance on his own will. That was why he couldn't give up his search for the shotgun shell. It was not only priceless in itself; it was a symbol of his determination to resist reduction to the primitive level as long as possible.

What had he expected? The swiftly built prototypical cabin, the dammed stream, the planted vegetable garden, slowly extending, the ownerless herds coaxed into control and redomesticity, the masterly defense against marauders, discovery of others rejecting barbarism, the joining of forces — couples and young children only, no single males in any circumstances — under his leadership which couldn't help but be acknowledged after his single-handed mastering of obstacles, the final triumph when the group at last emerged from hiding and established themselves openly in an abandoned village or town? Romantic.

His fingers touched the ridged base of a shell. Lucky, was his first thought; incredibly, unbelievably lucky. To find the shell which might have hopped and rolled anywhere. Not the needle in the haystack, perhaps, but the shell in the grass.

Not luck. There wasn't any. Persistence.

His finger found the hole in the shell's mouth. The used one ejected from the gun.

Mr. Jimmon sat down on the grass. This was no absolute tragedy, no cause for final despair. Two shells had been wasted instead of one; the toll of fruitless pursuit had been doubled. He still had — how many? Enough for a careful year yet, perhaps. Not despair; discouragement.

He had been foolish and adventurous to start out so late after game; it had been a gesture to show — himself or Erika — that he was the Admirable Jimmon after all. Pride goeth before an empty belly.

What was the difference between $x$ shells and $x$-1 shells? Why does a fireman wear red suspenders? "Put it down to experience," he muttered, tucking the disabled briefcase under one arm and the shotgun under the other.

Back at the stream he paused judicially. This was one job he had no doubts about. By moving the soft dirt — it would be better to make some sort of reinforcement of brush and stones on the downstream face first — he could build up his dam on either side of the flow to the required height and thickness before interfering with the course itself. Deepening to one side above the upstream face would give him a shallow reservoir where the water could be diverted while he feverishly plugged the bottom of the outlet. Then he could keep ahead of the rising level until the dam was high as he wanted it.

It was a good project; he'd put it off no longer. Begin at dawn tomorrow, jumping up without admonition, hurrying eagerly. When the dam was finished he'd make the shelter into a proper cabin. They would sink no further; from now on, no matter how slightly, their progress would be upward. Recivilization.

His ears, adjusted to the accustomed noises, the insects' scraping, the whirr and call of birds, the frogs' croak, the distant surf, the brook's purl, caught the sounds of Erika and the boy. He would say nothing of his determination. Match her fantasy of survivors with the reality of their own survival.

Instead of stepping gingerly from stone to stone, he leaped across the stream and walked briskly toward the shelter. Erika had a good fire going and was settling the kettle on top of it. Blacken it worse. Told her often enough about waiting for coals.

"Did you get anything, Dad?"

Something not quite right in her voice. The question should have been put sharply in a faintly contemptuous tone, with shadings of irritation and tolerance. Not with an undercurrent of . . . what? Non-recognition bothered him momentarily.

"Nhnh-nhnh." He put away the shotgun carefully. "Straps broke on the briefcase again," he called over his shoulder, taking out the shells, knife and flint. "Try to sew it stronger this time, ay?"

"If I get the chance. Brought back some abalone for you."

If she doesn't leave the undersized ones alone there soon won't be any at all. Have to go way out; dive for them. I couldn't. Univalves; all muscle to hold the half-shell to rocks. Expand outward, opening to suck in food; knife slips, fingers caught, the shell clamps back against the rock self-protectively; drowned.

Complaint and fear threaded through his gratefulness. Dutiful daughter; I have nourished my father. Lenore? Electra? Somebody. Erika's breasts were small; did this have anything to do with the boy's poor start? Think not; Molly had never been able to nurse for long. Pediatricians; supplementary feedings; formulas. Erika had had to; no choice.

He accepted the saucerlike shells, noting with surprised pleasure that she had cooked them for him. He drew in the meaty smell, scooped the rubbery flesh out and chewed thoughtfully. Better pounded; not so essential in these immature. . . . Careful my tooth; not that side.

" 'M going fishing right away," he announced, mouth full.

"Why?"

Startled, he paused in his chewing. "Why?" It was a pointless question. Why am I going fishing. To catch fish. "Duty to provide," he mumbled jocularly.

She stuck a testing finger into the kettle. "Duty," she echoed thoughtfully, withdrawing the kettle from the fire. She knelt, letting her hair fall forward into the water. Both Mr. Jimmon and the boy watched.

She sopped and wrung, dipped again; cupped her hands and poured the water over her scalp, rubbing it in. Over and over. How can she expect without soap, thought Mr. Jimmon; and what for? Same reason I shave; preserve the amenities. Still. Odd thing to do in the middle of the day.

She rose to her feet and began massaging the loose strands between her palms. "Duty," she said; "why?"

"Ay?" For a moment he didn't understand the connection. "Oh. Responsibility. Biological. Social."

She held a handful of dripping hair up and away from her face to peer at him. "And Mom?" she asked levelly. "Wendy, Jir and Mom?"

Impulse. The impulse at the exact moment of opportunity at the end of a day when inhibitions are relaxed. He could never have forced Molly and the boys out of the car, could never have driven off with a startled Erika beside him if he had had to state anything, justify himself, argue. He could not have done it if they had even been in sight, if their knowledge of his betrayal and abandonment had been coincidental with the act instead of delayed till after accomplishment.

What was the relevance of all this now? If Erika didn't know these things, how could he possibly communicate them to her? Certainly there was no way in which he could recreate, even if he wanted to, the peculiar emotional atmosphere of that day of escape.

It was not the arraignment which astonished him so much as the "Mom." From that electric moment of awareness in the stationwagon, Erika had spoken aloofly of "Mother." This sudden reversion to the locution of childhood must mean . . . what? Guilt had become so pervasive a word in the books Molly used to read it had no meaning at all.

Carefully he said, "Survival would have been impossible. I also owed a duty to you and to myself." For a strange moment he felt it was the man of eight years back talking; D. A. Jimmon who had a home in Malibu and an office on Spring Street. "Besides," he added weakly, "I gave her all our money. Twenty thousand dollars."

"Money you thought would never buy anything again," she commented neutrally, working vigorously on her hair.

"And still think. Know, in fact. That's not the point. Molly could never see that I might possibly be right; *she* was convinced it had and would always have value."

She divided her still damp hair with quick, sure motions and began braiding one side. "They would have been quite impossible," she admitted dis-

passionately. "But that isn't the point either. If you hadn't been ruthless —"

"Unsentimental," corrected Mr. Jimmon.

"Unsentimental, then. You had to be, in order to survive."

"For us to survive." But he was pleased with her understanding.

She finished braiding one side and started on the other. He waited for her to continue. She took both braids and wound them around her head, tying them with a bit of torn blue cotton. "I don't see . . ." he began at last, puzzled.

"Take the boy along with you, will you?"

"What?" he asked, more confused than before.

"Fishing. Didn't you say you were going fishing right away?"

"Oh. Yes. But . . ." He looked at the empty abalone shell in his hand, turned it over and inspected without seeing the delicately stitched row of blow holes. "You want me to take him along?"

She'd never asked him before. Have to carry the boy at least part of the way. Nuisance. But she was right, of course. Have to begin teaching him.

He rose. "Well. All right."

"Don't want to go back fishing."

"But we weren't fishing before, dear. Just looking for shellfish and stranded crabs. Dad'll take you really fishing."

"Don't want to go."

Undersized for four. If he was four. What standard did he have for comparison? Faded memories of Jir and Wendell and children seen-unseen on the street. Boy was probably exactly average. Even his health, considering the diet. *Sickly* was only a revulsion, or a wish he might have been sturdier, brighter than most. The Nineteenth Century folktales opposed to historical knowledge. Ptolemies and Incas. Or didn't the Incas? Think they did.

Erika put her arms around the boy and kissed him. None of the Jimmons were demonstrative. "Go with Dad," she said. "I want you to."

"Come on," suggested Mr. Jimmon, not unkindly. "Come on if you're coming."

"He needs eggs," said Erika; "milk really, but there's no milk. And greens; the dandelions are pretty well all gone now, but there's other stuff around here. You can tell by chewing on them raw if they're good to eat. And warm covers at night."

"You haven't done badly with him, Erika," said Mr. Jimmon. "Fact is, I'd say you'd done very well."

Lack of the briefcase was a nuisance. He would have to take knife, flint-and-steel and string in his other hand; forget extra gut, hooks, sinkers. "Come on," he repeated; "carry you piggyback."

The arms around his neck seemed frail; certainly his weight was light. If

I could have gentled a cow the milk would have made all the difference. Perhaps even now — was that what she was getting at? Maybe when the dam was finished. The cattle might not have strayed too far or learned too great a wariness.

"Luck, Dad," Erika called out, with the same strange undertone in her voice. "Don't let him get cold."

"Mm." He was partly choked by the boy's clutch.

He jogged thoughtfully downhill. Despite his efforts and warnings a definite path had been worn from the shelter to the highway. He would have to conceal it again as best he could, with pine needles and debris. Speak to her again of the seriousness of exposing themselves so. If only he could regain communication with her.

"Why do I have to go back fishing?"

"Not exactly have to. Erika thought you're getting big now; time to learn things."

"Don't want to."

"All right," he agreed absently. A strange smell drifted under his nostrils. Familiar, but not smelled recently. Acrid, faint, almost sweet; not a skunk far off, though. "You don't have to. Just watch me catch fish for us all."

"Don't want to watch."

Annoying little . . . No wonder Erika wanted to fob him off for the afternoon. He tried to adjust the boy's position on his back to make carrying a little easier, but his filled hands thwarted the attempt. "Try not to pull back against my neck," he urged.

Even before he stepped out from between the trees into the thick brush smothering what had once been the shoulders and ditches of the highway, he knew something was wrong. Was the unfamiliar familiar smell stronger here? "Shsh; quiet," he whispered.

"Don't —"

"Shsh!" he hissed.

He waited silently to see if the foreign presence, if that was what it was, would betray itself before he went forward into the open. Imagination? Hunch? Worth going back for the rifle?

"I —"

"Shsh, I told you. Mean it."

The trees were as they should be: forbearing, imperturable, unindicative. Whatever was wrong — if indeed there was anything wrong and his startle had not been completely unwarranted — had not touched the redwoods.

Nor the brush, he thought as he pushed his way through it, deliberately avoiding the path Erika had carelessly trampled. The upstart growth was arrogant. "No one been here," he muttered under his breath.

"What you say, Dad?"
"Shsh, shsh. Quiet."
"But . . ."
"Be qui—!"

It was the road itself which told everything. Even before he stepped out on its surface, before he read what was so plain to see, Mr. Jimmon felt the contraction of dread in his chest.

The highway was not as he had known it six years earlier when he had grunted to Erika, sleepy and awed, "Guess this is the place." It was no longer a clean strip of nearly white concrete worm-patterned with black tar. Leaves and sand had blown across it steadily in the ceaseless wind from the ocean, to be caught and held at the near edge, building back a dune to snare the earth that was stamped and filtered into it by the rain. The compound was not disturbed; the concrete was buried now, anchored under ever-accumulating topsoil on which sparse grass and undernourished plants grew thinly but stubbornly, their taproots stunted by the slab below. The highway was still clearly defined, but no longer as what it was; now it was only a sick swathe through the vigorous brush and woods.

But the swathe was not as it had been yesterday and the day before and last week and last year. The track of the interloper was plain and bold to see, insolently plowed through the soft detritus, imperiously proclaiming its roughshod advance on the vulnerable mass.

He put a foot on the violated surface. The signs were plain, too plain. The ultimate meaning was obscure, obscure as the fate they represented, but the immediate story was crystal clear.

Without any doubt the plump-to-plump U marks, coming from nowhere, going nowhere, were the tiretreads of a jeep. They impressed themselves on the thin soil; man's insigne on top of nature's futile try at blotting out man's insignia.

The jeep, with treads still thick enough to leave so firmly a distinguishing mark, was — what? Not, certainly, utter disorganization. Not after six years. Whoever rode that jeep might be marauder and pillager, but as between them (or him) and Mr. Jimmon, it was the jeep which represented civilization and Mr. Jimmon savagery.

"Why you don't go on, huh, Dad?"

"Mmmm," answered Mr. Jimmon perfunctorily.

Warily he moved forward. Neanderthaler sniffing the spoor of Cro-Magnon. Friday astonished by the print of Crusoe. What was implicitly engraved on the dirt? A jeep, yes; but what else? Who? Man or woman? Three or four men? Men of good will, seeking their fellows? Or fleeing from them? What was the personal history of the jeep's occupants? What had

they been six years ago, and for the six years past? Were they reconcilers or destroyers?

Mr. Stanley, I believe. Believe what? Believe anything.

Out of nowhere into nothing. Was it? No question the tracks were not quite in the center of what had once been a highway, premier numbered, paved, celebrated, maintained and budgeted for by the sovereign state of California. By ever so slight a deviation, but consistently, quite as though it were done by habit rather than intent, the tracks bore to the west side.

West side. Rule of the road, except in the unlikely event the jeep driver was an Englishman or New Zealander inexplicably traveling an unpopular American highway, meant west was right side. The jeep came from the north and was heading south. Logic.

Still cautiously, as though the tracks themselves could suddenly materialize the vehicle and its occupants, he moved across the road and peered at the surface. Abruptly he spoke over his shoulder at the boy. "Were these marks here when you and Erika came home?"

"Huh?"

Patiently he repeated the question.

"I want to go home now."

Had she warned him to reveal nothing? Would he have understood? It was a disadvantage not to be able to see the child's face — but could he have divined anything from it anyway? And if she had wanted him not to see the tracks wouldn't she have made an attempt to persuade him not to come down here? Was the boy intelligent enough for deception?

He trod delicately along the road's edge; the ground was not quite soft enough to show her footprints. Besides, if she had seen the tracks and not wanted him to know she could easily have avoided walking on them. Why should he suspect her of hiding anything?

The ill-concealed excitement. The novel request to take the boy along.

Why? He would have expected her to rush back with the news, exultant. It must seem she had been right about survivors, he wrong; why didn't she triumph? Or supposing she had had second thoughts of the intruders' goodwill, wouldn't she yet have wanted to tell him of their existence?

He stepped high over the impressions. Could they have been made after she returned? Not only was such pat timing highly doubtful, it left her elation unaccounted for. Nor was it reasonable to think the tracks had been made before she'd gone down to the ocean that morning; no one would drive a road so long unused for the first time at night. Logic said the jeep must have passed on its southward way while Erika searched the rocks for shellfish.

Had its occupants seen her? There was no indication from the tire marks

of a stop and start. He could take it for granted their existence was still concealed; unless the jeep returned it might remain so.

He smothered the impulse to turn back. If she had suppressed a knowledge, mention would only harden whatever curious reaction she might have had. And if, improbably, she did not know of the jeep's passage, nothing was to be gained by telling her. Yet.

There was no further point in staring down at the tracks. Reluctantly he faced away from them and walked through the thin cover which ended in sand-rooted pine and cypress. "Have to let you down now," he said over his shoulder; "hold on to my hand going between these rocks and we'll be all right."

"Can't."

" 'Can't'? Why can't you?"

"You got your fishing rod in that hand."

Mr. Jimmon shifted the rod into the hand already encumbered by knife and flint and took the boy's free one. Jir — David Alonzo Jimmon junior — would be twenty-three now.

The tide was low and still going out. Spume gurgled in the spongy rocks; subduedly now, explosively at high tide. "You sit down here," he directed, putting his gear in a safe place, "and watch."

Carefully he picked his way over the craggy strand to an exposed point where the water alternately sucked and smashed at clusters of dark, dripping mussels. A long slimy tail of green seaweed puffed and dwindled like wet wool. Mr. Jimmon selected a promising hump of large shells, down low, and pulled. The Pacific, resenting the impudence, covered them promptly and wet him to the knees. The boy laughed.

He went back and got his knife. As the next wave receded he stabbed, sawed and hacked at the tough fibers to which the mussels clung. After several more wettings he succeeded, panting, in retrieving a good-sized clump. Retreating, he opened the largest shell, cut a piece of the soft orange meat and gently worked it on his hook. He adjusted the float, and going forward, cast out as best he could with a light sinker and dangling line. The float bobbed some ten feet out.

Stepping back to where the boy was playing with a tiny fiddler crab in a rocky tidepool, he gently reeled out line. The float moved erratically seaward. Glancing over his shoulder he confirmed his certainty that this spot was invisible from any part of the road.

Currents tugged moodily at the rod's tip, nodding it gravely, twitching it, pulling it slowly down and letting it slowly come back. The degree of civilization in man was inversely proportionate to his preoccupation with the business of getting food. For him it was an all day chore, and an una-

voidably direct one: he could perform no act — like writing insurance or welding aluminum — which could eventually be translated into calories. His relation with what he ate was always intimate.

For the jeep riders it must be immediate too; their removal from his savage status was made clear when you considered how little time they must have to spend food-getting. They were the sportsmen who could spot game and bring it down as they sped along; they were the lords of survival who could find the still intact stores of canned goods and gorge voluptuously on such rare delicacies as solid-pack tomatoes or evaporated milk.

The tug on the rod was suddenly sharp; the tip bent, the float went under, bobbed back, moved in a swift arc. Mr. Jimmon pulled enough to set the hook, and reeled in steadily, faintly excited by the struggle. "Bass," he grunted with satisfaction.

"Oooh, big fish," said the boy as the line, having been drawn in till the float came against the eye, was flipped overhead with a gray and brown calico writhing on the hook. He laid the rod down precisely, detached the fish, left it flopping on the rocks, baited the hook again, cast, played the float seaward, caught the rod between his knees, took up the fish under the gills, scaled it despite its throes, gutted and cleaned it, cut off the head and threw the offal into the water.

"Think you could do that?"

"Don't want to."

Mr. Jimmon pulled in another bass, slightly smaller, and threaded both on his string. Then he lost his bait. The tide was turning now; the float no longer eased its way outward but bobbed back and forth close to the spot where the cast had taken it. "But I have to get another fish," he explained. "One for you and one for me and one for Erika."

"Don't want fish. I want to go home."

Home, thought Mr. Jimmon; these are the standards of the rising generation. Must do something about fixing up the shelter. Jeep drivers can occupy luxury hotels — spider webs and neglect-yellowed sheets included. Those not radioactive or preempted by other jeep drivers. Which is the way to civilization? Unless Erika is right and the jeep drivers are just looking for recruits to utopia. Jeep eat jeep.

"Just one more," he said.

The tide began coming in more swiftly. Reluctantly he wound up his line, removed the float, lowered the leader and cast out again for bottom fish. If nothing else he might get a small shovel-nose, whose tail made good eating, boiled.

"Good eating?" he repeated aloud. "I'm damned sick of fish. All kinds."

"What you say, Dad?"

"Nothing. Nothing."

If the briefcase hadn't broken he'd have brought along a heavier sinker. This one was far too light; he could feel it rolling and tumbling over the bottom with each swell. Bait probably gone by now too; ought to pull up and put on gristle. Fish didn't care so much for it, but it stayed on.

He wound up slowly; the line grew taut. Angrily he gave slack, hoping the ebb would pull the sinker or hook out of whatever it was caught on. He gave lots of slack, then reeled in gently, steadily. Again the line tightened.

The impulse to jerk, to try and snap it loose was almost irresistible, but as with the shotgun shells the thought of the diminishing store made him unnaturally prudent. (The jeep riders could be extravagant; the solitary Eskimo had to cherish his solitary possession.) If he had not cast out from a point there might have been a way of getting to seaward of the snagged tackle.

A roller smashed against the rocks and the spray stung his face. If he didn't get it loose soon it would be hopelessly caught. Or the line would fray through. He gave ample slack, hoping the big wave's backwash might take the sinker with it. But when he reeled up, the line was still tight.

"Another one gone," he mourned. He let the line out for a last time, allowed it to lie limp in the foam, reeled in steadily against the ebb. The line pulled, he pulled. Then he wound up the broken line, shorn of leader, hook and sinker.

"Come on, we'll go home."

He gathered his knife, flint-and-steel, float, the two bass and the clump of mussels. Steamed, they were tasty enough.

"Piggyback. I want to ride home piggyback."

"All right," said Mr. Jimmon wearily. "Climb on."

When the lead sinkers were all gone he could use nuts from the station wagon. They should last his lifetime if he could get them off; before then his lines would be rotted through. He had been provident and thought of the future, but apparently he'd not thought far enough.

One could almost sink into believing in some malicious design. The final irresponsibility of shifting cause and effect onto the shoulders of devils or gods. The retreat from payment for mistakes or rewards for intelligence. The Lord is my shepherd because I have the brains of a sheep.

He trudged over the rocks and sand, the boy heavy and wearisome now. Nearing the highway he paused, watchful, like a dog scenting. No alien sights or sounds disturbed him. The faint smell of gasoline — was it his imagination? The parallel ruts lay stolid, unchurned; there were no others following or coming back.

Stepping across them again he peered southward. Savior or destroyer?

Mystery was danger; knowledge, the old cliche had it, was power. The presence of the tracks resolved nothing; neither Erika nor he had been proven finally right or wrong. But whatever the character of the jeep's occupants, crude or gentle, sage or bumpkin, they portended no good to him. They represented a line of development in which he had no place.

Suddenly his depression lifted. Cro-Magnon had not fathered modern man after all. There was survival and there were the blind alleys of evolution. There was no guarantee that by the standards which ultimately counted the jeep represented superiority and he inferiority. Or more aptly, fitness and unfitness. Tomorrow he would work on the dam. When that was finished he would make the shelter into a genuine cabin. The boy was four; soon he could be taught to read. For that matter there was much he could teach Erika.

He had been supine; he acknowledged it freely. But from now on things would be different. Perhaps he had needed the shock of the jeep to shake him back into struggling. Force himself to learn to do the things for which he had no talent.

He took even more care than usual to avoid the scuffed path. Once the dam was built he could utilize the small clear patches for cultivation. Though the seeds were ruined he might still search out domesticated plants gone wild and coax them back.

He had known the looters and ravishers would come; it was to avoid them he had the station wagon packed and waiting against the day of necessity. But wasn't it true he had also foretold, dimly perhaps, the jeep and the way of life represented by the jeep? He had built no mammoth concrete shelter underground, nor had he tried to find refuge on some remote Pacific island. His had been the middle, sensible course, as befitted a survivor and the prototype of survivors.

In time, might it not even be possible that the mutual reserve and distrust which had grown up between himself and Erika would dissolve? That they were man and woman was far less important than that they were father and daughter.

She was not outside the shelter, nor was the fire going. "Erika," he called, hoping she had already mended the briefcase. "Erika?"

"Erika," echoed the boy.

Mr. Jimmon eased him down from his back; put the fish and mussels next to the fireplace. He laid his rod beside the stream, unreeling all of the line that had been even dampened, washing the salt water off carefully. Then he looped it loosely over the bushes to dry. Only then did he go inside. "Erika?"

He took a handful of the dry moss kept in reserve and went back to the

fireplace. Careless of her to let it go out that way, knowing from experience how long it took to make a new one. On the fourth try the spark struck from the flint-and-steel made a filament of moss glow; he blew it quickly into flame and fed it slowly with crisp pine needles. A quick start for once.

When the fire was established he added small brush and laid on three medium-sized boughs. He scooped up a small quantity of water into the bottom of the kettle and dumped in the mussels. Then he set the two bass as close to the fire as he could without danger of their scorching.

"The hunter home from the hill," he muttered, returning to the shelter. Her watch was gone from the accustomed place. Now why would she . . . ? The briefcase lay on the ground, unmended.

The boy came in and stood beside him. "I'm hungry now. Where's Erika?"

"In a minute," he answered; "in a minute."

"Hungry," repeated the boy.

Reluctantly Mr. Jimmon began his search. Rifle and shotgun were intact in their hiding places. So was the other fishing rod, something no one bent on robbery would have missed. And the two steel bows. He hesitated before looking further.

The revolver's cache was empty, and the three separate repositories for its cartridges had been cleaned out. There was no possibility of doubting. There really never had been. Duty. Pity in her voice under the elation. Ruthlessness-unsentimentality.

Mr. Jimmon spoke gently. "Come on, Eric. There's a fish for you and one for me; by the time they're gone the mussels will be done."

It was the first time, so far as he could remember, that he'd called or even thought of the boy by name. Needs eggs and greens; warm covers at night.

"Where's Erika? I want Erika."

"I'm afraid Erika has gone away for a while," said Mr. Jimmon soothingly. "Looking for something. You and I will have to make out as best we can without her. Come on now Eric, eat your fish; tomorrow we'll look for gulls' eggs. And there might be berries not too far away."

Mr. Jimmon regarded his own fish with distaste. His tooth had finally begun to ache. Badly.

*To date the zany concoctions of John Novotny have chiefly graced the pages of* Esquire. *Here is the first of, I hope, many Novotny improbabilia to appear in F&SF; and I think you'll have as much fun as I did in discovering the work of this noble madman whose cockeyed view of things as they are (and might be) is expressed in a style refreshingly his own.*

# *The Angry Peter Brindle*

*by* JOHN NOVOTNY

Principal Malloy shook the homework papers in front of Mr. Peter Brindle's face.

"I repeat, sir," he said sternly. "This is utterly ridiculous."

"I agree," Mr. Brindle snapped. "That my daughter, or any other child, should be handed that amount of homework is completely ridiculous."

"The amount happens to be trifling," Principal Malloy stated. "I refer to the contents."

"They too are ridiculous. A child of eleven should not have to cope with slide rules," Peter Brindle said.

Principal Malloy drew a deep breath.

"The problems can be solved by substitution, long division, and simple addition. These answers were arrived at by a nincompoop."

Mr. Brindle pushed the papers aside and extended his neck.

"Are you calling my Dorothy a nincompoop?"

"Your Dorothy does her work excellently in class; particularly geography. Hoboken is not the capital of New Jersey. Your Dorothy did not do that homework!" Mr. Malloy said tapping Mr. Brindle's breastbone. "I am calling you a nincompoop!"

Mr. Brindle's eyebrows shot up and his neck became a lively red. He extended a quivering forefinger almost to Malloy's nose.

"You are a dirty —"

The principal closed his eyes and waited. After a long silent second he opened them. The office was empty.

Peter Brindle looked at his finger and then at Officer Mulvaney's nose which the finger almost touched.

"Well?" Officer Mulvaney inquired.

Peter Brindle swallowed.

"With your kind permission," Mulvaney went on, "I'm for letting the cross-town traffic move along."

"Yes — indeed, yes," Mr. Brindle stuttered.

"Then would you be removing your finger?" Mulvaney smiled sweetly. "It blocks me vision."

Peter Brindle examined the finger and then placed it at his side. He frowned at the officer as the automobiles sped by on each side.

"What have you done with Malloy?" he demanded. Mulvaney cocked his head to one side and fingered his chin.

"If it's the Burlesque you're wanting you're in the wrong town," he said. "But I'm inclined to think you're in the right spot. Hoboken has all the bars a man could ask."

Mr. Brindle began to shift his feet nervously. He looked around at Hoboken.

"I hadn't finished speaking to Malloy," he murmured unhappily. The policeman suddenly slapped his own forehead.

"Malloy's Harbor!" he smiled. "Two blocks toward the piers and one block to the right. Only once was I there and that on business."

"I'll hurry along," Mr. Brindle said quickly. "Thank you."

" 'Twas a raid," Mulvaney called after him. "I had no time to sample his stock."

"It's quite good," Peter Brindle called back. "Thank you."

Mr. Brindle tried not to think as he walked along the street toward the bar. The fact that he had been transported, with the speed of light, from Public School 74 to the Hoboken business district did not lend itself to reasonable thought. Mr. Brindle turned into Malloy's Harbor and sought out the telephone. He dialed the school number and waited.

"Principal Malloy?" he asked.

"Speaking."

" — a dirty no-good martinet," he concluded. "I wonder what the school board would say if they heard your joint had been raided. Eh?" He clamped the receiver back in place and brushed off his hands triumphantly. He stopped at the bar.

"I'll have a triple scotch."

"I can't explain it, Margaret. One moment I was speaking to that jackass Malloy and the next moment I was in Hoboken."

Margaret Brindle sat down across from him at the kitchen table and took one of his hands.

"Look, Pete," she said quietly. "I know you've been drinking. I can

smell it, and that's unusual for you. Maybe you just thought you were in Hoboken."

"I certainly would know the capital of Jersey, wouldn't I?" Peter asked indignantly.

"I don't know," his wife shrugged. "Didn't you and Dorothy have an argument about that last week? I guess I should have gone to the school."

"I'm sure you would have enjoyed meeting that Irish cop," Peter said drily. "There I stood with my finger an inch from his nose."

"Let's go to bed, Pete," Margaret suggested. "A good night's sleep will fix you up."

"I've got to help Dorothy with her math homework."

Margaret shook her head.

"She's in bed. I helped her earlier. Guess she didn't have much tonight. It only took about fifteen minutes."

Peter frowned and headed for bed.

It was three weeks later on a Saturday morning that Peter Brindle's anger became kindled again. He was playing golf at Merrybrier. Normally Peter enjoyed a placid round of golf, accepting the bad shots and exulting in the few good ones. He had never broken a hundred.

As they approached the tee for the short seventeenth, Eddie Lake glanced down the column of figures on the card and nodded.

"Hey there, Pete. You have eighty-nine and only two to go. Looks like this is your day."

Peter Brindle smiled deprecatingly.

"My honor?"

"Fire away," Eddie said.

Mr. Brindle teed up his ball and threatened it with his five iron.

"Hundred and forty-five yards," he murmured, setting his feet. He swung. They watched the long high rise of the ball.

The ball faded to the right as it fell.

"Whoops!"

Peter glared at the puff of sand that rose as the ball disappeared.

"Happens to the best," Eddie consoled. He wound up, beat his ball into the ground, and nodded approvingly as it jackrabbited along, finally rolling up to the edge of the green.

"I use my three iron on this hole," Eddie explained. "Always get a beautiful roll."

"Hmmm."

They pulled the caddy carts behind them and Peter descended into the sand trap.

"I'll blast," he announced.

Eddie winced as a cloud of sand showered the green. He squinted around and then turned inquiringly toward the trap.

"I hit too far back of the ball," Peter called. "Hold the flag, will you?"

Eddie held the flag and hid his face behind his arm as more sand came out.

"Getting to look like Jones Beach up here," he said. "Why don't you just sort of flick it out?"

Peter forced a strong grin.

"The books say you must blast," he announced.

Eddie huddled and waited. A sharp click came from the trap and the ball shot out. It sailed over the green, over another trap, over the fence, and was heading down a paved street when Eddie turned back.

"Might just about reach Peekskill," he observed. "That's good for a nine iron. Guess you didn't hit back of the ball that time." He retreated from the flag as Peter strode from the trap.

"And the eighteenth is four hundred and fifty yards long," Peter ground out. He drew back his arm and aimed the nine iron after the ball. Eddie was suddenly alone.

Max Grogowski was tying the laces of his hunting boots when his eye caught the expensive golf shoes and argyle socks. He looked up slowly and then brought up his arms to cover his head. Peter stared at him and slowly lowered the golf club. Max peered out from between his fingers.

"Sam! Harry! Come out the tent. We got company."

Sam crawled out and whistled.

"Geez, Mac. You really must have clouted one."

"You don't yell, 'Fore'?" Harry asked. "We could be killed."

Peter studied the hunters, their tent, and their very wild-looking surroundings.

"Hunting?" he asked. Max snorted.

"Nah. Badminting. We're building a court."

"Is the hunting good on . . . Long Island?" Peter tried hopefully, disregarding the sarcasm.

"Sure," Max said. Peter sighed with relief.

"But it's better here in Peekskill," Sam said. Peter closed his eyes.

"Peekskill," he repeated.

"Two miles down the road," Sam said.

"Thank you," Peter said, heading slowly for the indicated road. "Oh, if you happen to find the ball I lost you may keep it."

"Thanks," Max called after him. "Next time yell, 'Fore.'"

Peter plodded along and thought. He plodded almost to the Peekskill

railroad station before deciding that his anger and his sudden trips were allied. With that Peter stopped thinking.

"You're markin' up my car," Conductor Ehlein told him.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Them shoes," Conductor Ehlein explained. "Markin' up my car. And don't go clankin' that cane around."

"It's a golf club," Peter said.

"No golf playin' allowed in my car."

"I must not get angry," Peter murmured.

"Dang right you mustn't," Conductor Ehlein said. "T'ain't your car that's gettin' marked up."

"And I don't imagine that it's your car either," Peter retorted. "I assume it belongs to the New York Central."

"Oh you do? Well now, suppose I tell you I bought this car direct from the New York Central?"

"Did you?" Peter asked.

"Nope. But that's the way I feel about it. I don't like it marked up." Conductor Ehlein nodded once to enforce his remarks and walked on down the aisle. He returned in a minute and looked suspiciously at Peter Brindle.

"Almost talked me out of the fare, didn't you?"

Peter remained silent and took out his money. He extended it and then drew it back as the conductor reached forward.

"I want to be sure the New York Central gets this," Peter warned. "It's still their car." He considered it a moral victory as Conductor Ehlein fumed his way down the car.

"That man will disappear one of these days," Peter observed thoughtfully.

Margaret laid her book on the night-table and leaned over to smell his breath as he sank down on the bed.

"Where have you been, Pete? I've been worried."

"Peekskill."

"You went to Peekskill for golf?" Margaret asked in amazement.

"I went to Merrybrier for golf with Eddie Lake," Peter said, wearily placing his nine iron against the dresser.

"Where are the rest of your clubs?"

"I suspect that Eddie Lake has sold them by now. He is very cold-blooded."

"Pete! What's going on?" Margaret demanded. Peter Brindle looked at his wife.

"A phenomenon for which I have no explanation, Margaret. I lost my temper in a sand trap at the seventeenth hole. In a split second I was in Peekskill. Only missed it by two miles. When I got angry in Malloy's office I landed in Hoboken."

"When you get angry you — Oh Pete. Are you sure?"

"Good heavens, Margaret . . . !"

"All right, Pete. Stay calm," Margaret cautioned. "Tell me what happened."

Peter began with his par on the sixteenth hole and then the trouble on the seventeenth. Margaret listened intently as he repeated Eddie Lake's remark.

"Could the ball have reached Peekskill, Pete?" she asked. He stared.

"He was being facetious," Peter said. "A very annoying trait of which he is quite proud."

"I didn't know," Margaret said. "I thought maybe you decided the ball had gone to Peekskill and you subconsciously wanted to go after it."

"I knew it couldn't reach Peekskill," Peter said loudly, "and I am not that close with a buck."

"Take it easy, honey," Margaret urged.

"By all means," Peter agreed. "I could possibly end up in darkest Africa. Then I'd really have a trip back."

Margaret considered matters while Peter showered and got ready for bed. She leaned over and kissed him.

"Vacation is coming soon, Pete. Maybe two weeks rest will fix everything."

Peter smiled and snapped off the light.

"Good girl," he said. "Most other women would have become hysterical over something like this."

"I'd like to," Margaret confessed, "but I'm afraid you'd get mad."

Peter laughed softly and kissed her again.

Tuesday evening they were driving into town to catch an early movie when Peter found himself following a long yellow convertible.

"Drives like an old lady," he observed as the yellow car slowed down to twenty miles an hour for a curve.

"It is an old lady," Margaret said, "and she's just being careful."

"Well, she has California plates," Peter said. "If she drove across the country at this speed she must have started last August."

"Oh, Peter, just pass her if you must. I think she drives very well."

Mr. Brindle pulled out to go by and the yellow convertible cruised over into the left lane ahead of him. Peter glared.

"She was just being careful," Margaret explained hurriedly. "There were some red lanterns back there."

"They were up on the sidewalk," Peter said angrily, following the old lady back to the right as the road narrowed. "California drivers should stay in California. Look, there are some pigeons on the road up ahead. I'll bet —"

The red tail lights on the convertible flashed as the old lady stopped. The Brindle car squealed behind her.

"I knew it!" Peter roared, reaching for the door handle. Margaret looked at the license plate on the offending car and had a horrible thought.

"Coney Island!" she screamed. Peter was gone. Margaret crossed her fingers and eased into the driver's seat as the old lady pulled away after the pigeons had departed.

The sailor and the blonde were quite surprised as Peter Brindle came crowding into the seat beside them.

"Hey, mister!" the sailor protested. "Only two supposed to be in a seat."

"I'll get out," Peter moaned unhappily. "Where am I now?"

"You're on the Cyclone," the blonde said, "and it's too late to get out. We just started."

"The Cyclone?" Peter asked wonderingly.

"A roller coaster," the sailor said. "You didn't know?"

"I wasn't looking," Peter explained.

"You're a brave one," the blonde said admiringly. "Just step into any old ride, eh?"

"It amounts to that," Peter sighed.

"Well, we're stuck with you," the sailor said. "Let's get comfortable."

They nudged into place on the crowded seat and Peter looked around. The chain of cars was climbing a very steep hill.

"A roller coaster!" he said in sudden understanding. "We're going up!"

"Yeah," whispered the blonde grasping the rail.

"Yeah," gulped the sailor, looking straight ahead. Peter followed his gaze to the summit.

"To that?" he asked unbelievingly. His companions nodded woodenly.

"And then down," the blonde added.

"I'll put my arm around you," the sailor offered.

"If you don't mind you could put one around me too," Mr. Brindle suggested.

"What'll I hold on with?" the sailor asked.

Peter nodded sadly. "That's true."

"Here we go," the blonde announced. They grabbed the rail, gritted their teeth, and plunged. On the way up the next hill Peter started for

the bottom of the car. The sailor was already there.

"What are you doing down there?" Peter demanded.

"You think I'm crazy?" the sailor asked. "I was never on this thing before."

They screamed around a turn and dropped again.

"Who is gonna put their arm around me?" the blonde squealed.

"Him," the sailor said, pointing to Peter. Peter shut his eyes and did just that. When they finally glided down the last incline and came to a stop at the platform Peter and the sailor drew deep breaths. They helped each other out and then turned to the blonde.

"I'm going again," she smiled.

"Alone?" Peter asked unbelievingly. The blonde smiled at a passing soldier.

"I guess not," Peter muttered. He and the sailor shook hands and walked away.

When Peter arrived home Margaret was waiting.

"Where were you?" she asked.

"Coney Island," Peter said.

"I'm glad," Margaret sighed. "I was afraid it would be California."

"California?" Peter asked. "Why would —? Say, how about that yellow convertible? I just remembered now why I got mad."

"Nothing happened," Margaret said. "The pigeons left and she drove on. I went to the movie."

"Oh? How was it?"

"Silly," Margaret said. "One of those improbable plots. It started out —"

"Mother has explained it to you, Dorothy?"

"Yes, father. She told me all about it."

Peter patted his daughter's head approvingly.

"It is unusual but we have to live with it," he said. "The last few weeks have gone very smoothly. I'm sorry you and Mother wanted to go to the beach but I just need the mountains. Hunting, you know."

"Yes, father."

The taxi driver leaned out the door.

"If you expect to catch the 10:12 we better get moving," he said.

"Margaret," Peter called impatiently. He turned to Dorothy. "What can she be doing? There's hardly any luggage. She sent everything ahead except these two small bags. Didn't she?"

"Yes, daddy. We sent them Tuesday."

"Here I am," Margaret called, closing the front door behind her. "Is the oil burner —"

"Off," Peter called. "Hurry up."

They arrived at the station in record time and Peter rushed them in, glancing at his watch.

"We'll make it," he said. Dorothy stopped.

"There's gum on my shoe," she stated.

"I'll get it off on the train," Peter said.

"Let me see," Margaret said, setting down one bag. She bent over her daughter's shoe. Peter tapped his foot.

"That reminds me, Pete. I don't have gum. I'll get sick on the train without gum," Margaret said apologetically.

"Margaret!" Peter moaned. "The train!"

"Oh, we'll make it. Run and get the gum."

Peter dashed away toward the candy stand. Margaret bent down and conferred with Dorothy.

"Now remember. Hang on tight."

Dorothy nodded emphatically as Peter ran back to them.

"Let's go," he said breathlessly. "Track seven."

"Oh no," Margaret said. "Track eleven."

Peter smote his forehead. "Seven," he cried. "I'm sure it's seven."

Margaret eased close to him on one side and took his arm as Dorothy grabbed his other hand.

"I think I forgot my doll," Dorothy said.

Peter turned white. He looked around wildly and spotted a station attendant.

"The Mountain King?" he called.

"Just left on track seven," the man answered.

"Hang on," Margaret whispered hoarsely to her daughter as Peter's neck grew redder.

"On track seven!" he shouted.

"Lavallette!" Margaret yelled. People in the station looked around quickly but there was nothing to see.

Margaret breathed the salt air deeply as Dorothy studied the stores along the street.

"Look, mom! There's the grocery. It worked."

"Where are we?" Peter asked haltingly.

"Lavallette," she smiled. "Can you imagine that?"

"But I wanted to go to the mountains," Peter explained mildly.

"You'll love the swimming, Pete. C'mon. There's a little place for rent on the next block."

Margaret and Dorothy led Peter Brindle along the main street of Lavallette on the Jersey Highlands.

"What if Daddy gets angry again?" the girl asked softly. Margaret shrugged.

"Maybe we'll visit the mountains, too."

She glanced at her dazed husband.

"But I think we have a few days here," she said. "Daddy needs help to get real angry. You and I just won't give him any."

"Mother," Dorothy mused. "Why does this happen to Daddy?"

"Your father always wanted to travel," Margaret explained.

It was a lovely morning in Lavallette. Peter Brindle shook his head, shrugged, and walked on.

## *Robot Lonely*

His springs are now run down,
Aligning out of whack,
There is a seam of rust runs down
His tertiorillium back.

No one now will polish him,
Will re-electron tonic him,
Will micro-tune or furbish him
Or switch his feedback back.

To this his fortune's come:
Worn out, dilapidated,
Whose camshaft was of chrome
Whose gears were nickel-plated.

LEONARD WOLF

*What Dr. Rhine calls the new frontiers of the mind and John Campbell calls psionics has become so prevalent a theme in modern science fiction that Random House will shortly publish a collection by my favorite anthologist, Judith Merril, called* BEYOND THE BARRIERS OF SPACE AND TIME *and devoted entirely to stories exploring the not-quite-understood, not-quite-impossible potentials of the human mind. And thus science fiction comes full circle; for the earliest attempts in English fiction to put the terror of the unknown upon a rational rather than a supernatural basis dealt with the mental frontiers only beginning to be explored at that time — mesmerism, somnambulism, multiple personality. This is particularly evident in the work of the most neglected pioneer in science fiction, the American novelist Charles Brockden Brown, and in the shorter stories of such writers as Rhoda Broughton.*

*Miss Broughton is today quite unjustly forgotten; I believe this is her first appearance in an American magazine. In the 1870's she was a highly successful writer of three-volume novels for the lending libraries, a niece by marriage of Sheridan Le Fanu (author of one of the earliest and best psychological suspense novels,* UNCLE SILAS, *and such supernatural classics as* Green Tea *and* Carmilla) *who as uncle encouraged her and as editor bought her first novel. Most un-Victorianly, she disliked length and padding; and as soon as success enabled her to flout publishers' "requirements," she turned from three-deckers to novelets and short stories. From an 1873 collection comes this fascinating tale of mesmerism and psychic rapport — astonishingly modern in its easy succinctness, and enviable in any period for its imperceptible transition from light-hearted charm to bleak terror.*

# *The Man with the Nose*

*by* RHODA BROUGHTON

"LET US GET a map and see what places look pleasantest," says she.

"As for that," reply I, "on a map most places look equally pleasant."

"Never mind; get one!"

I obey.

"Do you like the seaside?" asks Elizabeth, lifting her little brown head

and her small happy white face from the English sea-coast along which her forefinger is slowly travelling.

"Since you ask me, distinctly *no*," reply I, for once venturing to have a decided opinion of my own, which during the last few weeks of imbecility I can be hardly said to have had. "I broke my last wooden spade five and twenty years ago. I have but a poor opinion of cockles — sandy red-nosed things, are not they? and the air always makes me bilious."

"Then we certainly will not go there," says Elizabeth, laughing. "A bilious bridegroom! alliterative but horrible! None of our friends show the least eagerness to lend us their country house."

"Oh that God would put it into the hearts of men to take their wives straight home, as their fathers did!" say I with a cross groan.

"It is evident, therefore, that we must go somewhere," returns she, not heeding the aspiration contained in my last speech, making her forefinger resume its employment, and reaching Torquay.

"I suppose so," say I, with a sort of sigh; "for once in our lives we must resign ourselves to having the finger of derision pointed at us by waiters and landlords."

"You shall leave your new portmanteau at home, and I will leave all my best clothes, and nobody will guess that we are bride and bridegroom; they will think that we have been married — oh, ever since the world began" (opening her eyes very wide).

I shake my head. "With an old portmanteau and in rags we shall still have the mark of the beast upon us."

"Do you mind much? do you hate being ridiculous?" asks Elizabeth, meekly, rather depressed by my view of the case; "because if so, let us go somewhere out of the way, where there will be very few people to laugh at us."

"On the contrary," return I, stoutly, "we will betake ourselves to some spot where such as we do chiefly congregate — where we shall be swallowed up and lost in the multitude of our fellow-sinners." A pause devoted to reflection. "What do you say to Killarney?" say I cheerfully.

"There are a great many fleas there, I believe," replies Elizabeth, slowly; "flea-bites make large lumps on me; you would not like me if I were covered with large lumps."

At the hideous ideal picture thus presented to me by my little beloved I relapse into inarticulate idiocy; emerging from which by-and-by, I suggest, "The Lakes?" My arm is round her, and I feel her supple body shiver though it is mid-July and the bees are booming about in the still and sleepy noon garden outside.

"Oh — no — no — not *there*!"

"Why such emphasis?" I ask gaily; "more fleas? At this rate, and with this *sine quâ non*, our choice will grow limited."

"Something dreadful happened to me there," she says, with another shudder. "But indeed I did not think there was any harm in it — I never thought anything would come of it."

"What the devil was it?" cry I, in a jealous heat and hurry; "what the mischief *did* you do, and why have not you told me about it before?"

"I did not *do* much," she answers meekly, seeking for my hand, and when found kissing it in timid deprecation of my wrath; "but I was ill — very ill — there; I had a nervous fever. I was in a bed hung with a chintz with a red and green fernleaf pattern on it. I have always hated red and green fernleaf chintzes ever since."

"It would be possible to avoid the obnoxious bed, would it not?" say I, laughing a little. "Where does it lie? Windermere? Ulleswater? Wastwater? Where?"

"We were at Ulleswater," she says, speaking rapidly, while a hot color grows on her small white cheeks — "Papa, mamma, and I; and there came a mesmeriser to Penrith, and we went to see him — everybody did — and he asked leave to mesmerise me — he said I should be such a good medium — and — and — I did not know what it was like. I thought it would be quite good fun — and — and — I let him."

She is trembling exceedingly; even the loving pressure of my arms cannot abate her shivering.

"Well?"

"And after that I do not remember anything — I believe I did all sorts of extraordinary things that he told me — sang and danced, and made a fool of myself — but when I came home I was very ill, very — I lay in bed for five whole weeks, and — and was off my head, and said odd and wicked things that you would not have expected me to say — that dreadful bed! shall I ever forget it?"

"We will *not* go to the Lakes," I say, decisively, "and we will not talk any more about mesmerism."

"That is right," she says, with a sigh of relief. "I try to think about it as little as possible; but sometimes, in the dead black of the night, when God seems a long way off, and the devil near, it comes back to me so strongly — I feel, do not you know, as if he were *there* somewhere in the room, and I *must* get up and follow him."

"Why should not we go abroad?" suggest I, abruptly turning the conversation.

"Why, indeed?" cries Elizabeth, recovering her gaiety, while her pretty blue eyes begin to dance. "How stupid of us not to have thought of it

before; only *abroad* is a big word. *What* abroad?"

"We must be content with something short of Central Africa," I say, gravely, "as I think our one hundred and fifty pounds would hardly take us that far."

"Wherever we go, we must buy a dialogue book," suggests my little bride-elect, "and I will learn some phrases before we start."

"As for that, the Anglo-Saxon tongue takes one pretty well round the world," reply I, with a feeling of complacent British swagger, putting my hands in my breeches pockets.

"Do you fancy the Rhine?" says Elizabeth, with a rather timid suggestion; "I know it is the fashion to run it down nowadays, and call it a cocktail river; but — but — after all it cannot be so *very* contemptible, or Byron could not have said such noble things about it."

"The castled crag of Drachenfels
Frowns o'er the wide and winding Rhine,
Whose breast of waters broadly swells
Between the banks which bear the vine,"

say I, spouting. "After all, that proves nothing, for Byron could have made a silk purse out of a sow's ear."

"The Rhine will not do then?" says she resignedly, suppressing a sigh.

"On the contrary, it will do admirably: it *is* a cocktail river, and I do not care who says it is not," reply I, with illiberal positiveness; "but everybody should be able to say so from their own experience, and not from hearsay: the Rhine let it be, by all means."

So the Rhine it is.

II

I have got over it; we have both got over it, tolerably, creditably; but after all, it is a much severer ordeal for a man than a woman, who, with a bouquet to occupy her hands, and a veil to gently shroud her features, need merely be prettily passive. I am alluding, I need hardly say, to the religious ceremony of marriage, which I flatter myself I have gone through with a stiff sheepishness not unworthy of my country. It is a three-days-old event now, and we are getting used to belonging to one another, though Elizabeth still takes off her ring twenty times a day to admire its bright thickness; still laughs when she hears herself called "Madame." Three days ago, we kissed all our friends, and left them to make themselves ill on our cake, and criticise our bridal behavior, and now we are at Brussels, she and I feeling oddly, joyfully free from any chaperone. We have been mildly

sight-seeing — very mildly most people would say, but we have resolved not to take our pleasure with the railway speed of Americans, or the hasty sadness of our fellow Britons. Slowly and gaily we have been taking ours. Today we have been to visit Wiertz's pictures. Have you ever seen them, oh reader? They are known to comparatively few people, but if you have a taste for the unearthly terrible — if you wish to sup full of horrors, hasten thither. We have been peering through the appointed peep-hole at the horrible cholera picture — the man buried alive by mistake, pushing up the lid of his coffin, and stretching a ghastly face and livid hands out of his winding sheet towards you, while awful gray-blue coffins are piled around, and noisome toads and giant spiders crawl damply about. On first seeing it, I have reproached myself for bringing one of so nervous a temperament as Elizabeth to see so haunting and hideous a spectacle; but she is less impressed than I expected — less impressed than I myself am.

"He is very lucky to be able to get his lid up," she says, with a half-laugh; "we should find it hard work to burst our brass nails, should not we? When you bury me, dear, fasten me down very slightly, in case there may be some mistake."

And now all the long and quiet July evening we have been prowling together about the streets — Brussels is the town of towns for *flâner*-ing — have been flattening our noses against the shop windows, and making each other imaginary presents. Elizabeth has not confined herself to imagination, however; she has made me buy her a little bonnet with feathers — "in order to look married," as she says, and the result is such a delicious picture of a child playing at being grown up, having practised a theft on its mother's wardrobe, that for the last two hours I have been in a foolish ecstasy of love and laughter over her and it. We are at the Bellevue, and have a fine suite of rooms, *au premier*, evidently specially devoted to the English, to the gratification of whose well-known loyalty the Prince and Princess of Wales are simpering from the walls. Is there any one in the three kingdoms who knows his own face as well as he knows the faces of Albert Victor and Alexandra? The long evening has at last slidden into night — night far advanced — night melting into earliest day. All Brussels is asleep. One moment ago I also was asleep, soundly as any log. What is it that has made me take this sudden, headlong plunge out of sleep into wakefulness? Who is it that is clutching at and calling upon me? What is it that is making me struggle mistily up into a sitting posture, and try to revive my sleep-numbed senses? A summer night is never wholly dark; by the half light that steals through the closed *persiennes* and open windows I see my wife standing beside my bed; the extremity of terror on her face, and her fingers digging themselves with painful tenacity into my arm.

"Tighter, tighter!" she is crying, wildly. "What are you thinking of? You are letting me go!"

"Good heavens!" say I, rubbing my eyes, while my muddy brain grows a trifle clearer. "What is it? What has happened? Have you had a nightmare?"

"You saw him," she says, with a sort of sobbing breathlessness; "you know you did! You saw him as well as I."

"I!" cry I, incredulously — "not I! Till this second I have been fast asleep. *I* saw nothing."

"You did!" she cries, passionately. "You know you did. Why do you deny it? You were as frightened as I."

"As I live," I answer, solemnly, "I know no more than the dead what you are talking about; till you woke me by calling and catching hold of me, I was as sound asleep as the seven sleepers."

"Is it possible that it can have been a *dream?*" she says, with a long sigh, for a moment loosing my arm, and covering her face with her hands. "But no — in a dream I should have been somewhere else, but I was here — *here* — on that bed, and he stood *there*," pointing with her forefinger, "just *there*, between the foot of it and the window!"

She stops, panting.

"It is all that brute Wiertz," say I, in a fury. "I wish I had been buried alive myself before I had been fool enough to take you to see his beastly daubs."

"Light a candle," she says, in the same breathless way, her teeth chattering with fright. "Let us make sure he is not hidden somewhere in the room."

"How could he be?" say I, striking a match; "the door is locked."

"He might have got in by the balcony," she answers, still trembling violently.

"He would have had to have cut a very large hole in the *persiennes*," say I, half mockingly. "See, they are intact, and well fastened."

She sinks into an arm-chair, and pushes her loose soft hair from her white face.

"It *was* a dream then, I suppose?"

She is silent for a moment or two, while I bring her a glass of water, and throw a dressing-gown round her cold and shrinking form.

"Now tell me, my little one," I say coaxingly, sitting down at her feet, "what it was — what you thought you saw?"

"*Thought* I saw!" echoes she, with indignant emphasis, sitting upright, while her eyes sparkle feverishly. "I am as certain that I saw him standing there as I am that I see that candle burning — that I see this chair — that I see you."

"*Him!* but who is *him?*"

She falls forward on my neck, and buries her face in my shoulder.

"That — dreadful — man!" she says, while her whole body trembles.

"*What* dreadful man?" cry I impatiently.

She is silent.

"Who was he?"

"I do not know."

"Did you ever see him before?"

"Oh, no — no, never! I hope to God I may never see him again!"

"What was he like?"

"Come closer to me," she says, laying hold of my hand with her small and chilly fingers; "stay *quite* near me, and I will tell you," — after a pause — "he had a *nose!*"

"My dear soul," cry I, bursting out into a loud laugh in the silence of the night, "do not most people have noses? Would not he have been much more dreadful if he had had *none?*"

"But it was *such* a nose!" she says, with perfect trembling gravity.

"A bottle nose?" suggest I, still cackling.

"For heaven's sake, don't laugh!" she says nervously; "if you had seen his face, you would have been as little disposed to laugh as I."

"But his nose?" return I, suppressing my merriment, "what kind of nose was it? See, I am as grave as a judge."

"It was very prominent," she answers, in a sort of awe-struck half-whisper, "and very sharply chiselled; the nostrils very much cut out." A little pause. "His eyebrows were one straight black line across his face, and under them his eyes burnt like dull coals of fire, that shone and yet did not shine; they looked like dead eyes, sunken, half extinguished, and yet sinister."

"And what did he do?" asked I, impressed, despite myself, by her passionate earnestness; "when did you first see him?"

"I was asleep," she said — "at least, I thought so — and suddenly I opened my eyes, and he was *there* — *there*" — pointing again with trembling finger — "between the window and the bed."

"What was he doing? Was he walking about?"

"He was standing as still as stone — I never saw any live thing so still — *looking* at me; he never called or beckoned, or moved a finger, but his eyes *commanded* me to come to him, as the eyes of the mesmeriser at Penrith did." She stops, breathing heavily. I can hear her heart's loud and rapid beats.

"And you?" I say, pressing her more closely to my side, and smoothing her troubled hair.

"I *hated* it," she cries, excitedly; "I loathed it — abhorred it. I was ice-cold with fear and horror, but — I *felt* myself going to him."

"Yes?"

"And then I shrieked out to you, and you came running, and caught fast hold of me, and held me tight at first — quite tight — but presently I felt your hold slacken — slacken — and though I *longed* to stay with you, though I was *mad* with fright, yet I felt myself pulling strongly away from you — going to him; and he — he stood there always looking — looking — and then I gave one last loud shriek, and I suppose I awoke — and it was a dream!"

"I never heard of a clearer case of nightmare," say I, stoutly; "that vile Wiertz! I should like to see his whole *Musée* burnt."

She shakes her head. "It had nothing to say to Wiertz; what it meant I do not know, but —"

"It meant nothing," I answer, reassuringly, "except that for the future we will go and see none but good and pleasant sights, and steer clear of charnel-house fancies."

## III

Elizabeth is now in a position to decide whether the Rhine is a cocktail river or no, for she is on it, and so am I. We are sitting, with an awning over our heads, and little wooden stools under our feet. Elizabeth has a small sailor's hat and blue ribbon on her head. The river breeze has blown it rather awry; has tangled her plenteous hair; has made a faint pink stain on her pale cheeks. It is some fête day, and the boat is crowded. Tables, countless camp stools, volumes of black smoke pouring from the funnel, as we steam along. "Nothing to the Caledonian Canal!" cries a burly Scotchman in leggings, speaking with loud authority, and surveying with an air of contempt the eternal vine-clad slopes, that sound so well, and look so *sticky* in reality. "Cannot hold a candle to it!" A rival bride and bridegroom opposite, sitting together like love-birds under an umbrella, look into each other's eyes instead of at the Rhine scenery.

"They might as well have stayed at home, might not they?" says my wife with a little air of superiority. "Come, we are not so bad as that, are we?"

A storm comes on: hailstones beat slantwise and reach us — stone and sting us right under our awning. Everybody rushes down below, and takes the opportunity to feed ravenously. There are few actions more disgusting than eating *can* be made. A handsome girl close to us — her immaturity evidenced by the two long tails of black hair down her back — is thrusting her knife halfway down her throat.

"Come on deck again," says Elizabeth, disgusted and frightened at this last sight. "The hail was much better than this!"

So we return to our camp stools, and sit alone under one mackintosh in the lashing storm, with happy hearts and empty stomachs.

"Is not this better than any luncheon?" asks Elizabeth, triumphantly, while the rain-drops hang on her long and curled lashes.

"Infinitely better," reply I, madly struggling with the umbrella to prevent its being blown inside out, and gallantly ignoring a species of gnawing sensation at my entrails.

The squall clears off by-and-by, and we go steaming, steaming on past the unnumbered little villages by the water's edge with church spires and pointed roofs, past the countless rocks with their little pert castles perched on the top of them, past the tall, stiff poplar rows. The church bells are ringing gaily as we go by. A nightingale is singing from a wood. The black eagle of Prussia droops on the stream behind us, swish-swish through the dull green water. A fat woman who is interested in it leans over the back of the boat and, by some happy effect of crinoline, displays to her fellow-passengers two yards of thick white cotton legs. She is, fortunately for herself, unconscious of her generosity.

The day steals on; at every stopping place more people come on. There is hardly elbow room; and, what is worse, almost everybody is drunk. Rocks, castles, villages, poplars, slide by, while the paddles churn always the water, and the evening draws grayly on. At Bingen a party of big blue Prussian soldiers, very drunk, "glorious" as Tam o'Shanter, come and establish themselves close to us. They call for Lager Beer; talk at the tip-top of their strong voices; two of them begin to spar; all seem inclined to sing. Elizabeth is frightened.We are two hours late in arriving at Biebrich. It is half an hour more before we can get ourselves and our luggage into a carriage and set off along the winding road to Wiesbaden. "The night is chilly, but not dark." There is only a little shabby bit of a moon, but it shines as hard as it can. Elizabeth is quite worn out, her tired head droops in uneasy sleep on my shoulder. Once she wakes up with a start.

"Are you sure that it meant nothing?" she asks, looking me eagerly in my face; "do people often have such dreams?"

"Often, often," I answer, reassuringly.

"I am always afraid of falling asleep now," she says, trying to sit upright and keep her heavy eyes open, "for fear of seeing him standing there again. Tell me, do you think I shall? Is there any chance, any probability of it?"

"None, none!"

We reach Weisbaden at last, and drive up to the Hôtel des Quatre Saisons. By this time it is full midnight. Two or three men are standing

about the door. Morris, the maid, has got out — so have I, and I am holding out my hand to Elizabeth when I hear her give one piercing scream, and see her with ash-white face and starting eyes point with her fore-finger —

"There he is! — there! — there!"

I look in the direction indicated, and just catch a glimpse of a tall figure standing half in the shadow of the night, half in the gas-light from the hotel. I have not time for more than one cursory glance, as I am interrupted by a cry from the bystanders, and turning quickly round, am just in time to catch my wife, who falls in utter insensibility into my arms. We carry her into a room on the ground floor; it is small, noisy, and hot, but it is the nearest at hand. In about an hour she re-opens her eyes. A strong shudder makes her quiver from head to foot.

"Where is he?" she says, in a terrified whisper, as her senses come slowly back. "He is somewhere about — somewhere near. I feel that he is!"

"My dearest child, there is no one here but Morris and me," I answer soothingly. "Look for yourself. See."

I take one of the candles and light up each corner of the room in succession.

"You saw him!" she says, in trembling hurry, sitting up and clenching her hands together. "I know you did — I pointed him out to you — you *cannot* say that it was a dream *this* time."

"I saw two or three ordinary-looking men as we drove up," I answer, in a commonplace, matter-of-fact tone. "I did not notice anything remarkable about any of them; you know, the fact is, darling, that you have had nothing to eat all day, nothing but a biscuit, and you are over-wrought, and fancy things."

"Fancy!" echoes she, with strong irritation. "How you talk! Was I ever one to fancy things? I tell you that as sure as I sit here — as sure as you stand there — I saw him — *him* — the man I saw in my dream, if it was a dream. There was not a hair's breadth of difference between them — and he was looking at me — looking —"

She breaks off into hysterical sobbing.

"My dear child!" say I, thoroughly alarmed, and yet half angry. "For God's sake do not work yourself up into a fever: wait till tomorrow, and we will find out who he is, and all about him; you yourself will laugh when we discover that he is some harmless bagman."

"Why not *now*?" she says, nervously; "why cannot you find out *now* — *this minute*?"

"Impossible! Everybody is in bed! Wait till tomorrow, and all will be cleared up."

The morrow comes, and I go about the hotel, inquiring. The house

is so full, and the data I have to go upon are so small, that for some time I have great difficulty in making it understood to whom I am alluding. At length one waiter seems to comprehend.

"A tall and dark gentleman, with a pronounced and very peculiar nose? Yes; there has been such a one, certainly, in the hotel, but he left at *grand matin* this morning; he remained only one night."

"And his name?"

The *garçon* shakes his head. "That is unknown, monsieur; he did not inscribe it in the visitors' book."

"What countryman was he?"

Another shake of the head. "He spoke German, but with a foreign accent."

"Whither did he go?"

That also is unknown. Nor can I arrive at any more facts about him.

IV

A fortnight has passed; we have been hither and thither; now we are at Lucerne. Peopled with better inhabitants, Lucerne might well do for Heaven. It is drawing towards eventide, and Elizabeth and I are sitting hand in hand on a quiet bench, under the shady linden trees, on a high hill up above the lake. There is nobody to see us, so we sit peaceably hand in hand. Up by the still and solemn monastery we came, with its small and narrow windows, calculated to hinder the holy fathers from promenading curious eyes on the world, the flesh, and the devil, tripping past them in blue gauze veils: below us grass and green trees, houses with high-pitched roofs, little dormer-windows, and shutters yet greener than the grass; below us the lake in its rippleless peace, calm, quiet, motionless as Bethesda's pool before the coming of the troubling angel.

"I said it was too good to last," say I, doggedly, "did not I, only yesterday? Perfect peace, perfect sympathy, perfect freedom from nagging worries — when did such a state of things last more than two days?"

Elizabeth's eyes are idly fixed on a little steamer, with a stripe of red along its side, and a tiny puff of smoke from its funnel, gliding along and cutting a narrow white track on Lucerne's sleepy surface.

"This is the fifth false alarm of the gout having gone to his stomach within the last two years," continue I resentfully. "I declare to Heaven, that if it has not really gone there this time, I'll cut the whole concern."

Let no one cast up their eyes in horror, imagining that it is my father to whom I am thus alluding; it is only a great-uncle by marriage, in consideration of whose wealth and vague promises I have dawdled professionless through 28 years of my life.

"You *must* not go," says Elizabeth, giving my hand an imploring squeeze. "The man in the Bible said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come'; why should it be a less valid excuse nowadays?"

"If I recollect rightly, it was considered rather a poor one even then," reply I, dryly.

Elizabeth is unable to contradict this; she therefore only lifts two pouted lips (Monsieur Taine objects to the redness of English women's mouths, but I do not) to be kissed, and says, "Stay." I am good enough to comply with her unspoken request, though I remain firm with regard to her spoken one.

"My dearest child," I say, with an air of worldly experience and superior wisdom, "kisses are very good things — in fact, there are few better — but one cannot live upon them."

"Let us try," she says coaxingly.

"I wonder which would get tired first?" I say, laughing. But she only goes on pleading, "Stay, stay."

"How *can* I stay?" I cry impatiently; "you talk as if I *wanted* to go! Do you think it is any pleasanter to me to leave you than to you to be left? But you know his dispositon, his rancorous resentment of fancied neglects. For the sake of two days' indulgence, must I throw away what will keep us in ease and plenty to the end of our days?"

"I do not care for plenty," she says, with a little petulant gesture. "I do not see that rich people are any happier than poor ones. Look at the St. Clairs; they have £40,000 a year, and she is a miserable woman, perfectly miserable, because her face gets red after dinner."

"There will be no fear of *our* faces getting red after dinner," say I, grimly, "for we shall have no dinner for them to get red after."

A pause. My eyes stray away to the mountains. Pilatus on the right, with his jagged peak and slender snow-chains about his harsh neck; hill after hill rising silent, eternal, like guardian spirits standing hand in hand around their child, the lake. As I look, suddenly they have all flushed, as at some noblest thought, and over all their sullen faces streams an ineffable rosy joy — a solemn and wonderful effulgence, such as Israel saw reflected from the features of the Eternal in their prophet's transfigured eyes. The unutterable peace and stainless beauty of earth and sky seem to lie softly on my soul. "Would God I could stay! Would God all life could be like this!" I say, devoutly, and the aspiration has the reverent earnestness of a prayer.

"Why do you say, '*Would God!*' " she cries passionately, "when it lies with yourself? Oh my dear love," gently sliding her hand through my arm, and lifting wetly beseeching eyes to my face, "I do not know why I insist

upon it so much — I cannot tell you myself — I dare say I seem selfish and unreasonable — but I feel as if your going now would be the end of all things — as if —" She breaks off suddenly.

"My child," say I, thoroughly distressed, but still determined to have my own way, "you talk as if I were going for ever and a day; in a week, at the outside, I shall be back, and then you will thank me for the very thing for which you now think me so hard and disobliging."

"Shall I?" she answers, mournfully. "Well, I hope so."

"You will not be alone, either; you will have Morris."

"Yes."

"And every day you will write me a long letter, telling me every single thing that you do, say, and think."

"Yes."

She answers me gently and obediently; but I can see that she is still utterly unreconciled to the idea of my absence.

"What is it that you are afraid of?" I ask, becoming rather irritated. "What do you suppose will happen to you?"

She does not answer; only a large tear falls on my hand, which she hastily wipes away with her pocket handkerchief, as if afraid of exciting my wrath.

"Can you give me any good reason why I *should* stay?" I ask, dictatorially.

"None — none — only — stay — stay!"

But I am resolved *not* to stay. Early the next morning I set off.

## V

This time it is not a false alarm; this time it really has gone to his stomach, and, declining to be dislodged thence, kills him. My return is therefore retarded until after the funeral and the reading of the will. The latter is so satisfactory, and my time is so fully occupied with a multiplicity of attendant business, that I have no leisure to regret the delay. I write to Elizabeth, but receive no letters from her. This surprises and makes me rather angry, but does not alarm me. "If she had been ill, if anything had happened, Morris would have written. She never was great at writing, poor little soul. What dear little babyish notes she used to send me during our engagement! Perhaps she wishes to punish me for my disobedience to her wishes. Well, *now* she will see who was in the right." I am drawing near her now; I am walking up from the railway station in Lucerne. I am very joyful as I march along under an umbrella, in the grand broad shining of the summer afternoon. I think with pensive passion of the last glimpse

I had of my beloved — her small and wistful face looking out from among the thick fair fleece of her long hair — winking away her tears and blowing kisses to me. It is a new sensation to me to have anyone looking tearfully wistful over my departure. I draw near the great glaring Schweizerhof, with its colonnaded tourist-crowded porch; here are all the pomegranates as I left them, in their green tubs, with their scarlet blossoms, and the dusty oleanders in a row. I look up at our windows; nobody is looking out from them; they are open, and the curtains are alternatively swelled out and drawn in by the softly-playful wind. I run quickly upstairs and burst noisily into the sitting-room. Empty, perfectly empty! I open the adjoining door into the bedroom, crying, "Elizabeth! Elizabeth!" but I receive no answer. Empty too. A feeling of indignation creeps over me as I think, "Knowing the time of my return, she might have managed to be indoors." I have returned to the silent sitting-room, where the only noise is the wind still playing hide-and-seek with the curtains. As I look vacantly round my eye catches sight of a letter lying on the table. I pick it up mechanically and look at the address. Good heavens! what can this mean? It is my own, that I sent her two days ago, unopened, with the seal unbroken. Does she carry her resentment so far as not even to open my letters? I spring at the bell and violently ring it. It is answered by the waiter who has always specially attended us.

"Is madame gone out?"

The man opens his mouth and stares at me.

"Madame! Is monsieur then not aware that madame is no longer at the hotel?"

"*What?*"

"On the same day as monsieur, madame departed."

"*Departed!* Good God! what are you talking about?"

"A few hours after monsieur's departure — I will not be positive as to the exact time, but it must have been between one and two o'clock as the midday *table d'hôte* was in progress — a gentleman came and asked for madame —"

"Yes — be quick."

"I demanded whether I should take up his card, but he said no, that was unnecessary, as he was perfectly well known to madame; and, in fact, a short time afterwards, without saying anything to anyone, she departed with him."

"And did not return in the evening?"

"No, monsieur; madame has not returned since that day."

I clench my hands in an agony of rage and grief. "So this is it! With that pure child-face, with that divine ignorance — only three weeks married —

this is the trick she has played me!" I am recalled to myself by a compassionate suggestion from the *garçon.*

"Perhaps it was the brother of madame."

Elizabeth has no brother, but the remark brings back to me the necessity of self-command. "Very probably," I answer, speaking with infinite difficulty. "What sort of looking gentleman was he?"

"He was a very tall and dark gentleman with a most peculiar nose — not quite like any nose that I ever saw before — and most singular eyes. Never have I seen a gentleman who at all resembled him."

I sink into a chair, while a cold shudder creeps over me as I think of my poor child's dream — of her fainting fit at Wiesbaden — of her unconquerable dread of and aversion from my departure. And this happened twelve days ago! I catch up my hat, and prepare to rush like a madman in pursuit.

"How did they go?" I ask incoherently; "by train? — driving? — walking?"

"They went in a carriage."

"What direction did they take? Whither did they go?"

He shakes his head. "It is not known."

"It *must* be known," I cry, driven to frenzy by every second's delay. "Of course the driver could tell; where is he? — where can I find him?"

"He did not belong to Lucerne, neither did the carriage; the gentleman brought them with him."

"But madame's maid," say I, a gleam of hope flashing across my mind; "did she go with her?"

"No, monsieur, she is still here; she was as much surprised as monsieur at madame's departure."

"Send her at once," I cry eagerly; but when she comes I find that she can throw no light on the matter. She weeps noisily and says many irrelevant things, but I can obtain no information from her beyond the fact that she was unaware of her mistress's departure until long after it had taken place, when, surprised at not being rung for at the usual time, she had gone to her room and found it empty, and on inquiring in the hotel, had heard of her sudden departure; that, expecting her to return at night, she had sat up waiting for her till two o'clock in the morning, but that, as I knew, she had not returned, neither had anything since been heard of her.

Not all my inquiries, not all my cross-questionings of the whole staff of the hotel, of the visitors, of the railway officials, of nearly all the inhabitants of Lucerne and its environs, procure me a jot more knowledge. On the next few weeks I look back as on a hellish and insane dream. I can neither eat nor sleep; I am unable to remain one moment quiet; my whole existence, my nights and my days, are spent in seeking, seeking. Every-

thing that human despair and frenzied love can do is done by me. I advertise, I communicate with the police, I employ detectives; but that fatal twelve days' start for ever baffles me. Only on one occasion do I obtain one tittle of information. In a village a few miles from Lucerne the peasants, on the day in question, saw a carriage driving rapidly through their little street. It was closed, but through the windows they could see the occupants — a dark gentleman, with the peculiar physiognomy which has so often been described, and on the opposite seat a lady lying apparently in a state of utter insensibility. But even this leads to nothing.

Oh, reader, these things happened twenty years ago; since then I have searched sea and land, but never have I seen my little Elizabeth again.

Note: *If this story stimulates you to look further into Miss Broughton's work, you'll find another Broughton tale — a chilling paradox of precognition — in the Merril anthology mentioned in the introduction. Five tales of suspense and the paranormal, including the one you've just read, were collected in book form in 1873 as* TALES FOR CHRISTMAS EVE *and republished in 1879 as* TWILIGHT STORIES; *under the latter title they were reprinted in 1947 by the London firm of Home & Van Thal, with an introduction by Herbert Van Thal, who has done so much to reinstate interesting but neglected Victorian fiction.*

*More and more readers are discovering the individual and unpredictable delights of the work of Evelyn E. Smith, since she has provided the highspots of several recent anthologies and won a well-deserved "special award" in Ellery Queen's annual contest. All of which makes me proud to point out that F&SF bought Miss Smith's first story, almost three years ago, and even prouder to present this latest one: a grim tale of the stern traditions of the Space Service and a young cadet's first and most perilous assignment.*

# *At Last I've Found You*

*by* EVELYN E. SMITH

It stretched between them, flat, smooth, shining, sterile; once it had been a tree, vibrant and aware with its own unanimal, unmineral kind of life. Now it was utilitarian and dead, its corpse planed, stained, and polished to the semblance of a desk. In fact, it was a desk. Behind it, the man with no name regarded the two before him without seeing them, and the pupils of his eyes, Pilecky thought, were like tiny, unripe cantaloupes.

"There is good and there is evil," the man said. "There is right and there is wrong. But an evil can be right and a good can be wrong. Or, to put it more succinctly, a wrong can be good and an evil can be right. How are we to distinguish between the good wrong and the evil right?"

"Ay, ay, sir," said Guttenplan, his tough, corneous, weathered face tight-lipped from the sad, experienced, fruitless years he had spent in the Service.

"Ay, ay, sir," said Pilecky, his young, soft, vulnerable face tight-lipped from a series of special training-school exercises for tightening the lips.

The man with the melon eyes looked impassively at them once more. *I should have been a ribbon clerk,* fright shrilled inside Pilecky's head. *I should have been a certified public accountant. Not this! I was not meant for this.*

Almost as if he had read the young man's mind, the nameless one opened lips like two steel girders. "There is no retrogression, no turning back," he said. "Once committed, you are bound forever. And forever is an endless eternity." Each syllable crepitated sharply in the small, quiet, secret room. "And, if you make a misstep, if you are captured in any way — trapped

in body or mind or soul — well, we cannot help you. It is the law of the Service."

Years of working in secret had reduced Guttenplan's voice to a mere wisp of susurration. "We shall not ask help, sir," the time-aged agent said simply, not a muscle in his face moving. Nor could his face move; years ago he had lost his real face in a skirmish and ever since had worn a remarkably lifelike imitation.

*Someday I too will be like that,* said the tinnitus inside Pilecky's skull. *I should have followed the safe, gentle paths. I should have been a physical training instructor, a vacuum cleaner salesman.*

The man behind the desk contemplated his hands; thick they were and etiolated like fine asparagus. "I have sent many — many on this misson, and all of them failed, as I expected them to fail. Lack of success always results in failure. It is not easy to cope with the difficult; in fact, it is hard."

*Fool, do not speak!* the thin self-voice cautioned inside the tortuous canals of Pilecky's tympana. *You do not want to hear the answer; better it were that you should not know.* But it is hard for the young to restrain their eager, questing tongues. "What happened to the others?" he asked, and his voice was a slender, impertinent rivulet of sound in the contrived stillness.

There was silence. If the man without a name had been capable of pity, there would have been pity in his voice. Since he wasn't, there wasn't. "They went mad, all of them," he replied at length. "Stark, staring mad. You will go mad too; it is in the nature of things. What must be, must be. We shall try, keep on trying, knowing always that we cannot succeed. Have you ever thought that there is a certain glory in failure?"

Pilecky never had. He thought about it now and came to the conclusion that he did not agree. But he was young, young in years, young in the Service. Some day he would think the same — if he lived. But he probably wouldn't live. Most people died.

The man behind the desk struck its burnished surface so abruptly, so violently that Pilecky involuntarily leaped three feet in the air. The other two looked at him without reproach, just a hint, a trifle askance. Not even an eyebrow was overtly raised, but, rubescent to the tips of his ears, Pilecky descended hastefully.

"We must discover the secret," the man without the name said, separating each syllable cleanly, as if his tongue were a sharp, shining, silver knife. "For ten long years these aliens have come through intergalactic space in their ship, from a planet circling Betelgeuse — they say — bringing their products with them and purchasing ours in exchange. Trading their wares for ours. And never once questioning the tariff!"

"There's something amiss," commented Guttenplan.

Pilecky trembled at the older man's temerity.

But the camaraderie of 30 years' slight acquaintanceship stood the old agent in good stead. The cantaloupe eyes were unclouded. "Ay, Guttenplan, you've struck the nail squarely upon the nob. Why is it that for all those years, search as we may, search as we will, we cannot find the secret of the power that motivates the aliens' ship? The secret which, held from us, alone keeps us confined to our own strait solar system, perhaps keeps us from unriddling the very conundrum of existence?"

Guttenplan's mask was unmoving, but his vitreous eyes deliquesced. "The dirty curs!" he wisped. "I say: shoot them like the dogs they are!"

The massive albescent hand clenched and struck the desk again. Wood quivered and groaned, remembering that once it was alive and could suffer and ache and twinge. "Nay, that will not serve the higher good. We do not seek revenge — at least, not yet. We seek knowledge. Knowledge is power. Conversely, power is knowledge. We must learn their secret first — afterward you may do with them what you will."

"Ay, I'll hang them by the thumbs," Guttenplan murmured.

*Oh, that I too could be as impervious, as pachydermatous as he is,* the Pilecky within whimpered. *But I have not the genius. I should have been a ceramicist. Or played the violoncello in a small string quartet.*

"They have no thumbs," the melon-eyed one remarked drily. "They are a nonhumanoid life form . . . But we have tried every means to discover their secret." And his voice was of a sudden reboant in the hushed confines of the little room. "Made our attempts and failed most miserably, most wretchedly, most damnably . . . We have tried, spied, pried — all to no avail. Now we are forced to the last, desperate measure — "

"And that is, sir . . . ?" Guttenplan's aphonic voice prompted.

The lustrous desk top shivered under a third blow. "It is our only hope. We must *ask* them their secret."

*Oh no, no, no, not that, not that,* Pilecky's mind screeched.

But Guttenplan retained the seeming of calm. "As you will, sir," he said quietly.

Pilecky could not help but admire him.

Surrounded by the hulky shapes of the regular interplanetary transports, the alien ship rested in its berth at Idlewild like a fragile, esoteric poem, perpetually aquiver, as if it were on the instant ready to take off . . . although it was not scheduled to do so until half-past 9.

What was the ship like? Men averted their eyes when they passed — not that it was so horrible but that its beauty defied human conception and

comprehension. It was a helix, a sphere, a cube, a jagged irregular shape. It was iridescent, opaline, prismatic, chatoyant. It was emerald, ocher, azure, amber, gamboge, puce, turquoise, luteous, porraceous, murrey, magenta, indigo, cyanic, xanthic, gridelin, saffron, citrine, roan, cobalt, vitrescent, garnet, apricot. . . . It was heaven and hell combined — sheer terror and divinest pleasure.

*I am afraid*, Pilecky's brain moaned. *I am afraid. I should have been a foetus, secure in the quiet darkness of the womb.*

Guttenplan seemed to sense this. *He too has been young*, Pilecky marveled. *He too must have known qualms and terror.*

"Don't let yourself be daunted, lad," Guttenplan said. "After all, they're naught but a pack of foreigners."

The words sent a freshet of self-confidence pouring into Pilecky's fear-arid mind. He lifted his head and threw back his shoulders. "Ay, comrade," he said, invigorated. "That's all they are after all." There was kindness in the older man, he thought. *The mask then was but a mask.*

An aperture widened in the side of the ship and two aliens peered forth. Pretty, delicate little creatures they were — nacre and ivory and pearl — though not humanoid by any stretch of the imagination, save for the long, golden curls and the large, wondering, limpid blue eyes (three apiece).

They spoke in English, with hardly a trace of accent in their dainty little voices — like the tinkling of small silver bells on a Christmas parcel.

"Oh, joy!" the larger one tintinnabulated. "Company!"

"How absolutely divine!" the other chimed. "Just in time for dinner. And we were afraid we'd have to eat all by our lonesome little selves. What gorgeous fun!"

"Darling," piped the first, "you're blocking the entryway. The handsome gentlemen can't get in with your great clumsy form in their path."

"Silly creature!" jingled the second, slapping the first lightly with a vivacious tentacle. "Silly, silly creature!"

"If you ask me," Guttenplan told his comrade, reducing his whisper to a silken thread of sound, "they're queers."

"How do we know what they are?" Pilecky asked, amazed at his own brilliance, his own audacity. "They might be female, or male-and-female, or something else entirely."

"Good man," Guttenplan commented. "Wouldn't have thought of that myself."

Pilecky glowed and sputtered deprecatingly, like a defective Roman candle.

"Come in, come in, come in," chimed the second alien. "All we have to do is lay another two places and we're all shipshape and ready. What

enchantment for us! Oh, rare, rare treat!" Delicate pastels of joy flecked his shimmering pearl body.

"You needn't worry about the food," the first said astutely. "All Earth comestibles; we do love them so. So much of your food is simply divine. Look what we have: hot cocoa with marshmallows and little cakes with varicolored icings and thick, soft chocolate creams . . . oh, the ecstasy, the joy of it all!"

Guttenplan and Pilecky started to move toward the ship; then halted, irresolute. Something besides light seemed to be coming from the open port — a warm glutinous aura. *I feel as if I were being bathed in glue*, Pilecky thought, *in warm, sweet glue.*

"We must go in," Guttenplan hissed. "The die is cast."

Pilecky conscientiously firmed his jaw. "Ay," he said.

"You wouldn't be able to understand our names in our — language," the first alien trilled, "so you'd better call us by Earth names. We've chosen simply precious ones for ourselves. Call me Hyacinth and —"

"And I'm Larkspur," gurgled the other. "Pretty, pretty names, don't you think?"

Pilecky found himself and Guttenplan in a cabin — a room as indefinable as the exterior of the ship. It was bathed in rich colors and soft lights, languorous frangible sensations — a series of rapidly changing abstract tapestries. The room, Pilecky noted dimly, seemed to fill the whole of the ship. Where then was the machinery?

The food Larkspur had described was set forth on a small species of table, set with purely terrestrial dishes and implements — evidently to exploit the meal's exoticism to the very full.

Pilecky felt large and clumsy and carnivorous as he gazed at the aliens and their simple dinner. Not that he felt any desire to eat Hyacinth or Larkspur, for they resembled nothing so much as spun sugar, and what he wanted was a thick beefsteak, swimming in melted butter and topped by mushrooms and perhaps onions. Onions! To think of onions in the company of these gossamer creatures was unthinkable!

"What's the matter?" Hyacinth fluttered. "Why aren't you eating?" To Pilecky's consternation, large tears stood in the alien's cerulean eyes, and three lachrymose eyes dismay so much more than two. "Have we done something wrong? Tell us? Have we?"

"Oh, no!" sobbed Larkspur. "And we tried so hard to make everything just right. We did so want to be friends, we did, we did."

"Everything's fine," Pilecky gruffed, accepting a cup of marshmallows sauced with cocoa. "It's just that we had to stop to catch our breath — long walk across the field."

Guttenplan looked at his subordinate and his expression was inscrutable. He turned back to the aliens. "Quite so," he agreed, sinking sharp, synthetic canines into a chocolate cream.

The aliens resumed their normal, joyous colors. "We've been trading here for years and years," Hyacinth offered, "and so few people ever come to call on us, and we do so adore company!"

"And we don't dare go out," shuddered Larkspur. "The rigors of your climate, my dears; I don't know how you can stand it. Of course —" he gave Pilecky a sidelong glance "— big strong men like you can take a lot more than poor little us." He laid a shyly tentative tentacle on the agent's arm. "Ooooo," he squealed. "Such muscles. Such strength. I'd be afraid to have you angry at me, really I would."

The lacy touch was not at all unpleasant. *Maybe these aliens are human after all*, Pilecky thought. *In a strictly nonhumanoid way, of course.*

Guttenplan looked at Pilecky, and this time the younger man thought he discerned a *soupçon* of reproach. Nonfraternization was the rule, but rules were made to be broken. Besides, in order to find out what they wanted to know, they must employ desperate measures — even, as a last resort, friendliness.

"What do you trade in?" Guttenplan asked, with the bluntness of experience.

"Oh, don't you know?" All that prevented Hyacinth from pouting was the fact that he had no lips. "I thought our products were known all over your world. We fill so many needs. We bring Valentines and popular ballads, embroidered pincushions and calendars and sentimental mottoes to hang on the wall. Heavy floral scents and our native sweetmeats, music boxes, photograph frames, and clocks that play tunes on the half hour. Little decorative boxes and other pretty bibelots."

"Your world is deficient in so many things," Larkspur sighed. "So many, many lovesome things."

"Larkspur!" Hyacinth jangled. "Manners! Manners!" He turned to the Earthmen. "But of course you have so many things we don't have. Honey, gardenias, violins . . ."

"Violins," Larkspur breathed. "Such exquisite ecstasy. I swoon when I hear some of your gypsy music, really I do." He began to sing to himself.

"But there's one thing you do have," Guttenplan pointed out — Pilecky held his breath; this was the moment and Guttenplan's the courage — "which you don't export and which we should very much like to have."

"What is that, hon?" asked Hyacinth, languidly popping a rose-colored petit four into his oral aperture. "Anything we have is yours — anything. Just name it."

"Ask and your wish will be granted," Larkspur chimed in.

There was a pause so pregnant it almost miscarried.

"The secret of the power which moves this ship?" Guttenplan asked. "The motive power. That's what we don't have — and we too would like to reach the stars, 'stead of being bound by an exiguous solar system."

"There has been talk around Betelgeuse," Hyacinth admitted, "and snide remarks bandied about anent your thinking yourselves too good to come visit us."

"They say you're aloof and unfriendly," Larkspur put in, "and too proud to go outside your own solar system, but we know that isn't true, don't we, darling?"

Both aliens regarded the Earthmen fondly.

Pilecky felt himself almost smothered by uliginous, succulent, melliferous sensations, as if he were being laved in thick nectar.

Guttenplan apparently sensed it too. "I feel like a fly caught on a piece of flypaper," he whispered. And, to the aliens, "But what is this power then?"

"You really don't know?" Larkspur asked. "Oh, you're just being funny." He tintinnabulated appreciatively. "Funny, funny Earthman."

"I am not either," retorted Guttenplan, a trifle more sharply than the turgid ways of diplomacy require. "And I don't know what you're talking about."

"But I always thought you knew . . . ?" Hyacinth's eyes were large and marvelful. "It's the same motive power as, I am given to understand, makes your planet rotate upon its axis . . . You mean you don't know how to use it?"

"Oh, isn't that too screamingly absurd?" Larkspur gasped. "Here they've had the power eons and eons and eons, without knowing how to use it, silly ninnies!"

Both burst into tinkles of delighted laughter.

"'D like to ram their ethereal little heads together," Guttenplan said *sotto voce*. To the aliens: "You must be mistaken. We don't have —"

"Yes we do!" Pilecky exclaimed suddenly. And he did know. Suddenly it had come to him on the last wave of viscid, enervating sweetness. "I know what the power is that makes the world go round. It's *love*, of course."

"Of course," beamed Hyacinth. "Absurdly easy. You mean you don't use the power of love to motivate *anything*? What makes your planes fly then? Your ships move? Your locomotives run?"

"Various kinds of power," Pilecky tried to explain, and his explanation was inadequate and he knew it. "There's the internal combustion engine and the Diesel . . ."

"But how foolishly, foolishly expensive," Larkspur chimed, "when love is free! And so much more powerful. . . . *The moon belongs to everyone*," he sang, "*the best things in life are fur-eeee*. . . ."

"Not our moon," Guttenplan said stiffly. "The United States took possession of it on March 28, 1971."

"Well, *our* moons are free," Larkspur said, "and so is love." He turned a delicate shade of pink. "*Love is Nature's second sun*," he said.

"*Mightier far*," Hyacinth added, turning sky blue, "*than strength of nerve or sinew, or the sway of magic potent over sun and star is love*. . . ."

"*To love is to believe, to hope, to know*."

"*Love is master where he will*."

"*Love conquers all*."

"*Love will conquer at the last*."

"*Love rules the court, the camp, the grave*. . . . Ah," said Larkspur, "but you must know all about love. You have so many beautiful proverbs, verses, ballads about it. . . . I wish I could remember them all."

"And you cannot use its power," mourned Hyacinth. "Oh, the pity of it all!"

"The pity, pity, pity of it," added Larkspur. "Try, my friends, you will discover that love can do anything, anything at all — really it can." He and Hyacinth embraced each other with fervent delicacy.

"And that — *that's* the secret?" Guttenplan asked. "That's how you cross interstellar space?"

"That's the secret," Hyacinth tintinnabulated. "Only it was no secret, for love lies all around us everywhere; it permeates your solar system; it pervades the galaxy; it is diffused throughout the universe. Oh, my dears, if you but love, you can move mountains. . . ."

"Providing you want to move mountains," Larkspur joined in.

Pilecky could see Guttenplan was still dazed. He himself was numbed with sweet, viscid, impersonal amorousness.

"No secret . . ." Guttenplan murmured. "No mystery . . ."

"*Ah, sweet mystery of life*," Larkspur began to sing in a high, pure, sweet, true voice, "*at last I've found you* . . ."

"*Ah, at last I know the secret of it all*," Hyacinth chimed in.

And, impelled by the power of so much pure emotion, so much unmitigated love, the ship began to quiver tenderly in all of its parts — only here were no parts but the whole — all was one and that was love.

"Oh, dear," clinked Hyacinth, "I'm afraid we've unintentionally generated too much power. The ship wants to start. Well, we'll have to leave a bit earlier than we'd planned; that's all. You'd better disembark, gentlemen, unless you'd like to come along with us."

"You're very welcome, of course," Larkspur murmured coyly, glancing at Pilecky. "Very welcome indeed."

Guttenplan got to his feet.

Pilecky hesitated. "Perhaps — I — should — go — with — them," he murmured, every word slow and thick, as if he were dragging it forcefully out of maple syrup.

Guttenplan seized the younger man's wrist and twisted, and the pungent, plangent, bright shaft of pain brought Pilecky back somewhat to his senses. "Really must go . . ." he babbled. "Wonderful time . . . see you again . . ."

Guttenplan dragged him off the ship.

"Don't forget to come visit us when we make our next trip!" Larkspur tinkled. "We'll be looking for you."

Guttenplan and Pilecky stood on the field, watching the alien ship dwindle to a scintilla in the distance. Still, it seemed, they could hear the thin, tuneful voices singing " . . . *for it is love that makes the world go round.*"

Guttenplan looked at Pilecky. Pilecky looked at Guttenplan.

"Thanks, old chap," Pilecky said; and the words came thick in his throat. "You saved me."

"Oh, it wasn't anything," Guttenplan said.

"It was too," Pilecky retorted, justifiably annoyed.

There was a silence. "What say," Guttenplan proposed, "we go behind the hangar and have a good, clean knockdown fight — no holds barred?"

"Champion," said Pilecky. "A smashing idea."

"I hate you," said Guttenplan.

"I hate you too," said Pilecky.

They beamed at each other.

*Mr. Sheckley wryly points out that, even if you are a first-class ladies' custom tailor, there is such a thing as being too expert at your craft . . . and too eager for business.*

# *The Slow Season*

*by* ROBERT SHECKLEY

If business had not been so slow, Slobold might not have done it. But business was slow. No one seemed to need the services of a ladies' custom tailor. Last month he had let his assistant go. Next month, he would have to let himself go.

Slobold was pondering this, surrounded by bolts of cotton, wool and gabardine, dusty pattern books and suited dummies, when the man walked in.

"You're Slobold?" the man asked.

"That's right, sir," Slobold said, jumping to his feet and straightening his vest.

"I'm Mr. Bellis. I suppose Klish has been in touch with you. About making the dresses."

Slobold thought rapidly, staring at the short, balding, fussily dressed man in front of him. He knew no one named Klish, so Mr. Bellis had the wrong tailor. He opened his mouth to tell him this. But then he remembered that business was very slow.

"Klish," he mused. "Oh yes, I believe so."

"I can tell you now," Mr. Bellis said sternly, "we will pay very well for the dresses. But we're exacting. Quite exacting."

"Of course, Mr. Bellis," Slobold said. He felt a slight tremor of guilt, but ignored it. Actually, he decided, he was doing Bellis a favor, since he was undoubtedly the best tailor named Slobold in the city. Later, if they discovered he was the wrong man, he could explain that he knew someone else named Klish.

"That's fine," Mr. Bellis said, stripping off his doeskin gloves. "Klish filled you in on the details, of course?"

Slobold didn't answer, but by means of a slow smile made it apparent that he knew and was amused.

"I daresay it came as quite a revelation," Mr. Bellis said.

Slobold shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, you're a calm one," Bellis said admiringly. "But I suppose that's why Klish picked you."

Slobold busied himself lighting a cigar, since he didn't know what expression to assume.

"Now down to work," Mr. Bellis said briskly, slipping a hand into the breast pocket of his gray gabardine suit. "Here is the complete list of measurements for the first dress. There will be no fittings, naturally."

"Naturally," Slobold said.

"And we must have the completed article in three days. That is as long as Egrish can wait."

"Naturally," Slobold said again.

Mr. Bellis handed him the folded piece of paper. "Klish must have told you about the need for absolute secrecy, but let me repeat it. Nothing can slip out until the branch is well established. And here is your advance."

Slobold was so completely in control of himself that he didn't even wince at the sight of five crisp $100 bills.

"Three days," he said, tucking the money in his pocket.

Mr. Bellis stood for a moment, musing. Then he shrugged his shoulders and hurried out.

As soon as he was gone, Slobold unfolded the measurements. Since no one was watching, he allowed his jaw to gape open.

The dress was going to be like nothing ever before seen. It would fit an eight footer quite nicely, if she conformed to certain bodily modifications. But what modifications!

Reading through the 50 separate measurements and directions, Slobold realized that the wearer would have to have three breasts staggered across her stomach, each of a different size and shape. She would have a number of large bulges on her back. Only eight inches was allowed for her waist, but her four arms — to judge by the armholes — would be the thickness of young oak trees. There was no provision made for buttocks, but a flare was provided for tremendous thighs.

The material specified was cashmere. The color was to be jet black.

Slobold understood why there would be no fittings.

Staring at the directions, he gently tugged at his lower lip. "It's a costume," he said aloud, but shook his head. Costume specifications never included 50 separate measurements, and cashmere was not a suitable material.

He read the paper again, frowning deeply. Was it an expensive practical joke? That seemed dubious. Mr. Bellis had been too serious.

This dress, Slobold knew with every tailoring instinct, was being made for a person who fitted its dimensions.

That was a shivery thought. Although it was a bright day, Slobold switched on the overhead fluorescent lights.

He decided, tentatively, that it might be for a wealthy, but terribly deformed woman.

Except, he thought, that no one in the history of the world had ever been deformed like that.

But business was slow, and the price was right. If the price were right, he was willing to make dirndls for elephants and pinafores for hippopotamuses.

Therefore, shortly he retired to his back room, and, turning on every available light, began to draw patterns.

Three days later, Mr. Bellis returned.

"Excellent," he said, holding the dress in front of him. He pulled a tape measure out of his pocket and began to check off the measurements. "I don't doubt your work," he said, "but the garment must be form-fitting."

"Of course," Slobold said.

Mr. Bellis finished, and put away the tape. "That's just fine," he said. "Egrish will be pleased. The light was bothering her. None of them are used to it, you know."

"Ah," Slobold said.

"It's difficult, after spending all one's life in darkness. But they'll get acclimated."

"I should imagine so," Slobold said.

"And pretty soon they can begin work," Mr. Bellis said, with a complacent smile.

Slobold began to wrap the dress, his mind racing, trying to make some sense out of Bellis' words. *After spending one's life in darkness*, he thought, as he tucked in the tissue paper. *Getting acclimated*, he told himself, closing the box.

And Egrish wasn't the only one. Bellis had spoken of others. For the first time, Slobold considered the possibility that Egrish and the rest weren't from Earth. Could they be from Mars? No, plenty of light there. But how about the dark side of the moon?

"And here are the measurements for three other dresses," Mr. Bellis said.

"I can work from the ones you gave me," Slobold said, still thinking of other planets.

"How can you?" Mr. Bellis asked. "The others can't wear anything that would fit Egrish."

"Oh, I forgot," Slobold said, forcing his attention back. "Would Egrish like some more dresses out of the same pattern?"

"No. What for?"

Slobold closed his mouth tightly. Bellis might get suspicious if he made any more errors.

He looked over the new measurements.

Now he needed all his self-control, for these were as different from Egrish as Egrish had been from the human norm.

"Could you have these ready in a week?" Mr. Bellis asked. "I hate to rush you, but I want to get the branch established as soon as possible."

"A week? I think so," Slobold said, looking at the $100 bills that Bellis was fanning across the counter. "Yes, I'm quite sure I can."

"Fine," Mr. Bellis said. "The poor things just can't stand light."

"Why didn't they bring their clothes with them?" Slobold asked, and immediately wished he hadn't.

"What clothes?" Mr. Bellis asked, frowning at Slobold. "They don't have any clothes. Never had. And in a little while, they never will again."

"I forgot," Slobold said, perspiring freely.

"Well, a week then. And that will just about do it." Mr. Bellis walked to the door. "By the way," he said, "Klish will be back in a day or two from Darkside."

And with that he was gone.

Slobold worked feverishly that week. He kept his store lights burning at all hours, and avoided dark corners. Making the dresses told him what their wearers looked like, and that didn't help him sleep nights. He devoutly wished Bellis hadn't told him anything, for he knew too much for his peace of mind.

He knew that Egrish and her fellows lived their lives in darkness. That implied that they came from a lightless world.

What world?

And normally they didn't wear anything. Why did they need dresses now?

What were they? Why were they coming here? And what did Bellis mean about getting them to work?

Slobold decided that genteel starvation was better than employment of this sort.

"Egrish was quite pleased," Mr. Bellis said, a week later. He finished checking the measurements. "The others will be too, I'm sure."

"I'm glad to hear it," Slobold said.

"They're really more adaptable than I dared hope," Mr. Bellis said. "They're getting acclimated already. And, of course, your work will help."

"I'm very glad," Slobold said, smiling mechanically and wishing Bellis would leave.

But Bellis was feeling conversational. He leaned on the counter and said, "After all, there's no reason why they should function only in the darkness. It's very confining. That's why I brought them up from Darkside."

Slobold nodded.

"I think that's all," Bellis said, tucking the dress box under his arm. He started toward the door. "By the way," he said. "You should have told me that you were the wrong Slobold."

Slobold could only grin foolishly.

"But there'll be no damage done," Bellis said. "Since Egrish wants to thank you in person."

He closed the door gently behind him.

Slobold stood for a long time, staring at the door. Then he touched the $100 bills in his pocket.

"This is ridiculous," he told himself. Quickly he locked the front door. Then he hurried to the back door, and bolted it. Then he lighted a cigar.

"Perfectly ridiculous," he said. Outside it was broad daylight. He smiled at his fears, and snapped on the overhead lights.

He heard a soft noise behind him.

The cigar slid from his fingers, but Slobold didn't move. He didn't make a sound, although every nerve in his body was shrieking.

"Hello, Mr. Slobold," a voice said.

Slobold still was unable to move, there in his brightly lighted shop.

"We want to thank you for your very fine work," the voice said. "All of us."

Slobold knew that he would go crazy at once, if he *didn't* look. There could be nothing worse than *not* looking. Slowly, inexorably, he began to turn.

"Klish said we could come," the voice said. "Klish said you would be the first to see us. In the daytime, I mean."

Slobold completed his turn and looked. There was Egrish, and there were the others. They weren't wearing the dresses.

*They weren't wearing the dresses.* How could they, when they had no bodies? Four gigantic heads floated in front of him. Heads? Yes, he supposed that the misshapen, bulging things were heads.

There was something vaguely familiar about them.

For a moment, Slobold tried desperately to convince himself that he

was having an hallucination. He couldn't have met them before, he told himself. Bellis said they came from Darkside. They lived and worked in the dark. They had never owned clothes, never would again. . . .

Then Slobold remembered. He had met them once before, in a particularly bad dream.

They were nightmares.

Perfectly understandable, he thought crazily. Long overdue, really, when one comes to think about it. No reason why nightmares should restrict themselves to the night. Daytime — huge, undeveloped area, ripe for exploitation.

Mr. Bellis had started a daymare branch, and here they were.

But why dresses? Slobold knew, then, what he had been making, and it was just too much. His mind began to shiver and tremble, and warp around the edges. He wished he could go decently insane.

"We'll go now," Egrish said. "The light still bothers us."

Slobold saw the fantastic heads drift closer.

"Thank you for the sleeping masks. They fit perfectly."

Slobold collapsed to the floor.

"You'll be seeing us," Egrish said.

## *The Foundation of S. F. Success*

If you ask me how to shine in the science fiction line as a pro of luster bright,
I say, brush up on the lingo of the sciences, by jingo (never mind if not quite right).
You must talk of Space and Galaxies and tesseractic fallacies in slick and mystic style,
Though the fans won't understand it, they will all the same demand it with a softly hopeful smile.

And all the fans will say,
As you walk your spatial way,
"If that young man indulges in flights through all the Galaxy,
Why, what a most imaginative type of man that type of man must be!"

So success is not a mystery, just brush up on your history, and borrow day by day.
Take an Empire that was Roman and you'll find it is at home in all the starry Milky Way.
With a drive that's hyperspatial, through the parsecs you will race, you'll find that plotting is a breeze,
With a tiny bit of cribbin' from the works of Edward Gibbon and that Greek, Thucydides.

And all the fans will say,
As you walk your thoughtful way,
"If that young man involves himself in authentic history,
Why, what a very learned kind of high IQ his high IQ must be!"

Then eschew all thoughts of passion of a man-and-woman fashion from your hero's thoughtful mind.
He must spend his time on politics, and thinking up his knavish tricks,* and outside that he's blind.
It's enough he's had a mother, other females are a bother, though they're jeweled and glistery,
They will just distract his dreaming and his necessary scheming with that psychohistory.

And all the fans will say
As you walk your narrow way,
"If all his yarns restrict themselves to masculinity,
Why, what a most particularly pure young man that pure young man must be!"

— ISAAC ASIMOV

*If this rime seems questionable, *cf.* "God Save the Queen." —A. B.

*There are two classic approaches in developing a science fiction theme — each the title of a well known story. One, titularly employed by Isaac Asimov, is* What if . . . *: what will happen if you introduce a new factor, from an invention to an entire alien civilization, into the world as we know it? The other, in Robert Heinlein's words, is* If this goes on . . .*: what will happen if some current factor in the world-as-we-know-it is pushed to its ultimate conclusion? It's this second method, less common but more immediate and terrifying, that William Morrison follows in this study of the final development, in a space-colonizing future, of audience-participation give-aways.*

# *Music of the Sphere*

*by* WILLIAM MORRISON

ILLUSTRATION BY KELLY FREAS

When he stepped out of the ship and looked around him, it was as if he had never been away. In more ways than one, he thought. He had fooled the croakers and the Cassandras and come back home. Sane. Not a thing wrong with him.

He walked along the stationary lane, disdaining the walking roadways that the passengers to and from some of the other ships used. Most of them were in a hurry, not satisfied with the rapid rate the roadway was going, and pushing ahead one way or the other impatiently as if they had business that couldn't wait. Business on Mars, Venus, Jupiter's satellites, even here on Earth. He had no business. And those two years, with all their difficulties, had taught him to wait. He took his time.

He came into the waiting room and stopped just past the doorway. It hadn't changed any that he could see at first glance. Not the same people, but the same *kind* of people. The same hurrying, the same anxiety on their faces. One man walked past him, blinking his eyes nervously, and right behind the man came an elderly woman with a nervous twitch of the right side of her face. Maybe there was a change after all, — for the worse.

The sound of music came to his ears, a thin tinkling sound. Somebody was playing the piano. He raised his eyes, and at the other end of the waiting room he saw an upright. No, *two* uprights. This is new, he thought. At each piano there was a little girl playing. Neither girl seemed to mind the

other, and nobody seemed to mind either of them. It was a little difficult to disentangle the melody of one piano from that of the other, and at first the net effect was a mere jangle of notes. Interesting, he decided. I knew they were going to great lengths to please the passengers, but to provide pianos for kids to practice on while waiting for their ships to arrive — that's something I didn't expect.

A familiar voice said, "Rinaldo! What are you doing here?"

He swung around to see Bill Michaels grinning at him, and he grinned back. As hand met hand, Bill's face made a grimace, as if of pain. Rinaldo wondered. He hadn't squeezed *that* hard. He said, with not quite the ease of manner he had felt a second before, "I just got back, Bill. How are you? How's everything?"

"Fine, fine. You mean that all this time you've been at that outpost you were assigned to — way out in space?"

"Sure. Where've you been staying?"

"Oh, I've been sticking to the old grind. Here on Earth, mostly. I did make one short trip to Venus, but that's all. It's just as well. Venus is still not civilized." He made the grimace again, and this time Rinaldo realized what it was. Not a symptom of pain, merely a nervous twitch. Same as the others had.

"How's the family?"

"Swell. Gertrude is fine, and the kids — here, let me show you their pictures." He dragged a folder out of his pocket, and set it for five second intervals. A series of twenty shots passed before Rinaldo's bored eyes.

"They certainly look good," he said with hearty politeness. "Fine kids. How old are they now?"

"Eight and ten. Gurla — look at her, would you ever think she's only eight? — Gurla plays the piano. Only been studying for six months, but she's got real genius. You should hear her. Makes those two spoiled brats sound like kids that never took a lesson."

That reminded Rinaldo of the two tinkling pianos, and this time he realized something he hadn't been able to before. While he had been talking to Bill, his ears had been doing a job of musical analysis on their own. The results were surprising. Both kids were playing the same tune, a simple tinkling tune in four-four time:

*DA, da, da, da,*
*DEE, da, da, da,*
*DA, dee, da, dee,*
*DEE, da, dee, da.*
*DA, da, da, da . . .*

And so on for a few more measures. The composition was no masterpiece to start with, and the fact that both of them were playing it didn't improve matters. They weren't playing together. Each kid was going ahead as if the other weren't there, and when she came to the end she started right over again. No wonder the net effect was one of monotonous jangling.

"These pianos," observed Rinaldo, "are something new."

"They had to put them in," said Bill. "Popular demand. Although so far as I can see, there's no reason why they had to put them side by side."

"Don't people complain?"

"Why should they?" asked Bill simply. "There have been some requests for damper mutes, but of course that does change the action and personally I think that the people who say that practice on dampered pianos is thrown away are perfectly right. I wouldn't let Gurla lay her fingers on one. It would ruin her touch."

"I wouldn't know," said Rinaldo.

"That's right, you haven't been keeping up with things." Bill stepped back, as if to scan his friend's face with greater care. "You look all right. How do you feel?"

"Oh, don't you worry about me. I'm in perfect shape."

"Is that what the doctors say?"

"I received a thorough examination when they took me off the post."

"Psychological too?"

Rinaldo grinned, but there was annoyance behind the grin. "Do I look crazy?"

"Oh, no, not at all," said Bill hastily. "But you know what people say. After three months alone in space, most people lose a lot of their contact with reality. After six months, a good many of them have lost all chance of recovery. And you —"

"I was out there two years," said Rinaldo. "Alone for two years. I found it wonderful."

"Sort of living in a world of your own, I guess."

"Not the way you might think. People around here get in each other's hair. Sure you need contact with others, but you need solitude too. I know I needed it when I went there. And the psychologists who tested me agreed. I had enough routine work to keep me busy — checking on the instruments, making a repair from time to time when something went wrong. And the rest of the time I was on my own. I had an exerciser to keep me in good physical condition, and I had my radio and television sets to keep me amused. I could tune in on broadcasts of any kind, any time I wanted to. Not that I *wanted* any kind — but anyway, I had the right of choice. I had books and film and sound spools."

"But that isn't the same thing."

"It was plenty for me. More than plenty. I used to operate on a thirty hour space day, because twenty-four hours weren't enough for all the things I wanted to do. I had time for everything, including thinking. I thought out a dozen problems I never had a chance to turn my mind to while I was on Earth. Problems that everybody has to think out, and that most people don't."

"Well, anyway, I'm glad that you came back all right." Bill's face twitched again, but his voice was hearty. "By the way, what was your work about? Something to do with the asteroids, wasn't it?"

"Yes, something about the asteroids."

Bill waited, and twitched while he waited. Finally he said in annoyance at Rinaldo's calm refusal to break the silence, "Well, out with it, Rinaldo. What was it?"

"Sorry, Bill. I'm not supposed to talk about it."

"Military secret?" asked Bill incredulously.

"Not exactly. Just a secret."

"Oh, well." He brooded over that, twitched again, and said finally, "Guess it's none of my business. Mind if I ask you what you're going to do now? Or is that a secret too?"

"Not at all. I intend to take it easy for a while. I can stand being with people now. I'm going to study them, learn what makes them tick."

"Going in for psychology yourself? That's a bad sign. You know what they say, Rinaldo — most of the people who become psychologists acquire their interest in the subject because they're at least half crazy themselves to start with." Bill meant it for a joke, but the effect of his smile was spoiled by the twitch.

"Maybe. But I'm not going to make a profession of it. Just do it for my own amusement. After what I've saved up during the past two years, I can afford to."

"It's your life," said Bill. "Say, how about dropping in on us for supper tonight? Gertrude would be glad to see you."

"Sure it wouldn't put her out?"

"Not at all. I'll just phone her now and let her know you're coming."

He had a wrist phone, and he spoke into it briefly. Rinaldo looked around him, aware of a slight feeling of annoyance, and not quite sure of what had caused it. Bill's doubts about his sanity? No, not that. That was more amusing than anything else. More likely the thing that bothered him was his own lack of acuity, his failure to observe that things had changed. He had stepped out of the ship glad to know that he himself was the same as before, and he had been willing to assume that Earth was too. But it wasn't.

For a man who wanted to study people he had been unaccountably obtuse. Maybe Bill was right, he thought, maybe you had to be a little off-center yourself to realize there was something wrong with other people. The men and women he saw around him moved in a way that was subtly different from the way he had known. His period of absence had blinded him to the change, but now his eyes were beginning to see again. Everybody seemed a little more abrupt, a little more nervous. The copter taxis darted about with more sudden fits and starts, hastening on in a series of zigzags where formerly they had flown in fairly smooth curves.

Tempers were short. A man and a woman, racing toward a corner from different directions, collided, and the next second were screaming furiously at each other. A guard who came up was curt with both of them. And the guard had a twitch of his own, his head jerking up suddenly and desperately as if his neck had become too short and he had to lengthen it or die in the attempt.

The driver of their own copter was surly, almost as if he resented their intrusion. When they got out, Bill insisted on paying him, and the driver looked at the tip and cursed Bill to his face.

No, it was not the same world. People had changed for the worse.

They went up to Bill's apartment, and when Bill opened the door, he called, "Hello, Honey, are you decent? I've brought that friend."

Gertrude was decent. She came into the foyer, her face wearing a smile of welcome, and Bill kissed her absently. She didn't twitch back at him. Score one for Gertrude, thought Rinaldo. True, he could detect on her features considerable anxiety that hadn't been there the last time he had seen her. But who wasn't anxious these days?

Bill said, "This is Rinaldo, Sweetheart. You remember Rinaldo?"

"How could I ever forget that passionate night we spent together?"

She could still laugh. They shook hands.

Bill said, "It's all right to talk about his sex life, but don't ask him any questions about that space station of his. Military secret."

"My, how interesting. I mean the secret. Do tell me all about it, Rinaldo. I won't breathe a single word to Bill."

Rinaldo grinned. "I'll make sure you won't," he said.

The sound of a piano came from the back of the apartment, and Rinaldo thought, "That must be Gurla, the genius." But it didn't sound as if a genius was playing, and it took a few seconds for the explanation to strike home. The playing here, as at the station, came from *two* pianos, not one. Gurla's older sister was also practicing on her own upright.

Gertrude was going on to ask much the same questions Bill had asked, and Rinaldo answered as before, parrying the curiosity about his work,

usually with remarks about women. It was fortunate for him that Bill had mentioned sex. That was a subject which enabled him to derail all lesser lines of inquiry. At the same time, Rinaldo wondered at the changes all about him.

Apparently he wasn't impressing Gertrude very favorably. She too seemed to be worried about his sanity, and this time he didn't find it quite so amusing. It was like meeting one after another a group of men each of whom told you that his name was Julius Napoleon. And when you told them that yours was plain John Smith, each one doubted you, and considered it suspicious that there were so many John Smiths around, and wondered almost to your face whether you had gone crazy.

I suppose I'll have to go through it with all my friends, he told himself. Maybe the simplest way will be to develop a twitch of my own, and be like the people they consider sane. That would save a lot of explaining.

Bill was saying proudly, "I want you to see Gurla."

Rinaldo followed him and Gertrude into the room where the kid was playing. The girl was tall for her age, but thin and harried-looking. As Rinaldo came into the room, she took her hands away from the piano and turned to look at him.

"Don't stop playing, dear," said Gertrude.

"But I'm tired, Mother. I've been practicing a whole hour."

"Mary Ellen next door practices for at least three hours every day. Sometimes four," Gertrude told her firmly.

"But I'm tired. My fingers hurt," the girl whimpered.

"Well, you may rest a minute if you want to. But don't leave the piano. You haven't done anywhere near enough for today."

"But, Mother —"

"Don't you argue with me!"

And then suddenly the kid was crying and Gertrude was screaming at her, viciously, her face contorted with fury. Rinaldo had the sense of embarrassment a man feels when he is present, through no fault of his own, at a bitter and unpleasant quarrel in some other person's family. Bill said grimly, "Your mother is right, Gurla. If you ever expect to win a prize, you *must* practice more."

Rinaldo edged out of the doorway. He was sorry he had accepted the invitation to eat here. Sorry, and puzzled. For the piece that Gurla, with her genius, was playing was the same simple

*DA, da, da, da,*
*DEE, da, da, da,*
*DA, dee, da, dee . . .*

And the sounds that came from her non-genius sister in the other room were the same.

Bill joined him outside the room. Gertrude was still shouting, and the kid was weeping bitterly, but even through the sound of the sobbing, the tinkling of the piano began again. And a moment later, the composition was going full swing, as before.

"These kids!" exclaimed Bill. "They don't understand the importance of practicing."

"Neither do I," said Rinaldo. "Why chain them down to that instrument of torture for three hours a day? And why teach them just that one piece, and no other?"

"I thought you knew," said Bill in surprise. "You said you had been listening to the radio and television."

"Only some of the time. I had one or two favorite stations. And there were certain programs I always turned off. Audience participation shows, giveaways, and related forms of bastard entertainment."

"But —"

"Moreover, I am conditioned against listening to contest blurbs on *any* program."

"That's silly." Bill twitched in disapproval at this additional symptom of insanity. "You miss a lot that way."

"You miss a lot when they stop applying lighted chlorophyll-containing matches to your fingers and toes."

Bill disregarded the insane comparison. "So that's why you haven't heard of the Contest!"

"I'm sorry to be ignorant."

"You should be. Well, it's easy to explain. You see, they're running about a dozen big contests, each with subcontests, and all of them part of one big Super Contest. It began — let me see, about a year and a half ago. I think Saturn Soap sponsored the first one on television."

"It was Venus Vanity," said Gertrude, who had come in and was listening.

"You're wrong, dear. I remember distinctly —"

"You're a fool," she said with contempt. No sign of any sense of humor now, thought Rinaldo. "Don't you try to tell me. It was Venus Vanity."

"Never mind who was the first," said Rinaldo, with the idea of soothing the animals. "It isn't important."

For a moment he thought they would both leap at his throat for saying that. What a perverted sense of values *he* must have! Finally Bill laughed uneasily. He also twitched, but Rinaldo was getting so used to that he hardly noticed it.

"I guess you've lost your sense of perspective," said Bill. "It's important

— but anyway, by now there are a dozen firms awarding prizes. And anybody is eligible to enter. The only requirement is that you must be a permanent resident of Earth. No Martians or Venusians need apply," he said happily. "Of course Venus Vanity really has nothing to do with Venus, any more than Saturn Soap has with Saturn."

"I know. You say that all contestants must play that same inspired composition?"

"Naturally. There are different classes, of course. Different age and talent groups, from three years old up to eighty, and from Genius AA down to Ordinary C. Thurla is in Ordinary A, which isn't too bad. The prizes are worth competing for, even in her class, or we wouldn't bother giving her lessons."

"What's this about a Super Contest?"

"That's run by the Council of Sponsors and is limited to previous prize winners and to contestants who want to compete outside their class."

"And all the contestants of every kind still play the same composition?"

"Why not? It increases the chances of winning. If you don't win with one sponsor, there's always the possibility of winning with another."

"Oh. I'm beginning to see a few things," said Rinaldo.

"The whole business is simple

enough. I have great hopes of Gurla. She's really Genius AA, her teacher says, but when they tested her they put her in Genius B, and of course that increases her chances. Both for the ordinary prize and the Super Prize."

"There's one thing that baffles me. With a composition as simple as this, how do the judges tell good playing from bad?"

"You evidently don't have much of an ear for music," said Gertrude. "It's easy to impress an audience when you play something flashy. But when you have to do something simple and at the same time profound, like this, you must have real talent, or you're lost. Each note must be perfect. Notice the difference between Gurla's playing and Thurla's."

"They sound the same to me," he admitted. "All I hear is, *DA*, *da* . . ."

The parents laughed, with a sort of benign contempt. "It's a good thing you aren't a judge," said Bill, his face twitching again.

"It's too bad they don't have a contest for those who are tone-deaf," giggled Gertrude. "But never mind that, Rinaldo, we love you anyway. Let's eat, shall we?"

They ate, and all through the meal, the two kids practiced. The dishes looked different, but they all tasted the same. They all tasted like *DA*, *da*, *da*, *da*, thought Rinaldo.

Afterwards, Bill and Gertrude were very hospitable. They invited him to sleep over, but he had absorbed as much music as he could, and he declined. He had a reservation, he told them untruthfully, at a hotel. And he left as soon as he could.

*DA*, *da*, *da*, *da*, *DEE*, *da*, *da*, *da* — it was everywhere. It was in the streets, in the hotel lobby, and in his room as well. He could hear it faintly through the walls, and the weak sounds, he now learned, could be as maddening as the loud banging from a piano right next to you. Once you were conditioned to it, he thought, the reaction was inevitable.

It couldn't be accidental. There must be something behind it, something that didn't meet the eye or ear. And he was going to find out what it was.

His room had a built-in TV set. Tuning in, he found that out of fifteen stations, eleven carried contest programs. On radio it was only 21 out of 53. And at the same time as the sound was borne to him by the magic of electromagnetic waves, it also came crawling through the hotel walls. He was surrounded, overwhelmed, by *DA*, *da*, *da*, *da*, *DEE*, *da*, *da*, *da*.

Out in space, even in the bad times at the beginning, he had never used a sedative or hypnotic of any kind, and he wasn't going to begin using the stuff here. Still, it *was* necessary to get some sleep. The hotel's medicine chest had thoughtfully provided for the need. On one of the shelves he found a small bottle of anesthetic ear oil, and he put a drop in each of his ears to paralyze the nerve endings.

When he was completely deaf, he slept. Unfortunately, his mind went on working beneath the surface on what he had experienced that day, and through a good part of the night he heard mentally, *DA, da, da, da . . .*

In the morning the effect of the anesthetic had worn off, and he heard the sound through the walls again. He dressed, checked out of the hotel, and started on his rounds.

He had been a little dishonest, just a little dishonest, he thought, pretending to Bill and Gertrude that everything had been perfectly lovely out there, and holding back on some of the unpleasant aspects. And he had held back also on his present plans. Still, it was none of their business that he was going to write a book about his experiences. It would only have confirmed their impression that he was crazy. He'd tell them about it when the manuscript was complete, when the publisher had added to the token advance he had given on the basis of the first two chapters and outline.

That the book would have a good sale he had no doubt. *Two Years Alone in Space* would have all the appeal of a voice from the dead or from some one who was barely on the edge of sanity. He'd have to overdramatize things a bit, play up some of the hallucinations he'd had, pretend that he had really believed he was in some sort of Moslem paradise for months at a time. That was what people liked. Or had liked, he added to himself. Before they developed a passion for *DA, da, da, da.*

His first stop that morning was the publisher's office. Mr. Thrigman himself was out, or rather not yet in, but the place was busy, and the sight of all those orders for books coming in reassured him. Maybe people couldn't help listening, but they also continued to read. Mr. Thrigman's secretary, her big, carefully made up eyes blinking annoyingly, said that Mr. Thrigman was anxious to see him, and would he please call later for an appointment. Someplace in the back, a piano was tinkling, and he said hastily, yes, he'd call. And he got out.

From Thrigman's office he went to the headquarters of Saturn Soap. The truth, he thought, was always a good first line of defense, so long as you didn't tell too much of it, and the young male secretary to whom he was sent by the receptionist seemed pleased by what Rinaldo had to say. He had been out in space for two years, and was writing a book about it, and part of the information he wanted to include was his reaction to the great homecoming. One of the most striking changes had been the inauguration of the Contest. Could he, please, have some authentic information about how the Contest had started, and whose marvelous brain had conceived this wonderful idea, and how? All the details, if you please. As background material for the soothing sanity of Earth, as contrasted with the psychopathological horrors of empty space.

The secretary was helpful, but vague. Between compulsive shrugs of his shoulders, he intimated that he didn't know anything, or perhaps he knew but his time was too important to be wasted in the telling. Here, however, was a nice booklet put out by Blivins, Blevens, Ripple and Cosgrove, the advertising firm which handled the Saturn Soap account and took care of all the details of the Contest. It had everything Rinaldo would want to know.

Rinaldo read the booklet, while pianos sounded endlessly around him. They were running off recordings of last night's contests. From the 64 pages of modest boasting he absorbed two ideas: one, that this was an advertising campaign without peer, with more than a billion dollars being spent in a twelve-month period; and two, that the idea of it did not originate with Blivins, Blevens, Ripple, Cosgrove, or any of the secondary geniuses in their employ.

The B.B.R.C. office was his next stop. Here he spoke to Miss Arrup, a representative of Murphy and Finger, the counseling firm which handled public relations for the advertising firm of Blivins, Blevens. Miss Arrup was tall, willowy, and gracious. She was also not stupid. He repeated his story to her, and she gave him the same booklet he already had. He asked for clarification as to the origin of the campaign, and she said that the way she had heard it, the idea had come to Mr. Finger one day when he was doing mental shaving. You've heard of mental shaving, haven't you, Mr. Rinaldo? Why, some psychologist has discovered that if you concentrate in just the right way, you can make the upper layers of your skin contract and cut off the nourishment to the hair follicles — at least that's the way I understand it. And without nourishment, the hair follicles under the surface will start to wither, and a day later, after they have grown out a bit, the hairs will break off if you just rub your hand over your face, and then they'll fall out. In this way, you can always shave from twelve to twenty-four hours in advance, and be sure that you present a nice non-bristly appearance.

Well, Mr. Finger had been shaving in this way, using all his powers of concentration, and his subconscious mind had been listening to his young daughter practice. And the idea had come to him, way down in the subconscious, "That kid's playing is worth a billion dollars. Yes, sir," he thought, "a billion dollars." And there it was, the whole layout of the Contest, like Minerva springing full-grown out of the head of Jove.

Miss Arrup repeated this story very engagingly, like a professional TV story-teller for children, with all the gestures and vocal intonations that meant she believed every word about Jack and the Giant herself, and surely her sweet little listeners and viewers would believe it too. Rinaldo muttered

to himself a vulgar phrase of disbelief. Perhaps it wasn't quite to himself, for Miss Arrup looked up at him sharply.

"Excuse me, Miss Arrup," he said. "Being out in space so long — you can imagine how it is. I guess I'm still not adjusted to Earth ways." And he smiled at her.

Miss Arrup smiled back. Whatever she felt, she could smile. That was a trick of her trade.

Well, Rinaldo knew a trick or two himself. He said, "Please don't smile, Miss Arrup. When you do that, you overwhelm me completely. I've seen some pretty girls since I've been back, but no one as beautiful as you, and when you smile, it's just too much. If I told you how I felt — no, I'd better not say a word."

For the first time in many years, Miss Arrup blushed. She knew the shameless kind of stuff he was using; she had spread too much of it herself, although more discreetly, not to recognize it. All the same, know what it was or not, discount it as much as you pleased, it still had its effect. It put her into a slightly non-professional mood. And when Rinaldo said, "I'd like to interview Mr. Finger, please, and get his own personal story of what happened," she didn't reject him so firmly as she should have done.

The bit of truth he had given was wearing thin. By now he had as much background as he had any right to ask for, and he certainly didn't need an interview with Mr. Finger. The purpose of the interview could only be something he was keeping to himself.

She said, "Mr. Finger doesn't give interviews."

"I know that. But this would be an exception, for an exceptional purpose. Mr. Thrigman assures me that the book will have a wide circulation, and it wouldn't hurt to have an anecdote by Mr. Finger read by large numbers of people."

Miss Arrup's right hand darted out, and Rinaldo's head jerked back out of danger's way. But she hadn't been trying to slap him. She said apologetically, "These flies are *so* annoying."

Rinaldo hadn't seen any fly. He said, "I didn't notice it."

"They're very tiny. And they make a horrible high-pitched buzz."

So that was her particular form of twitch. Rinaldo said, "I'm lucky. I'm not sweet enough to attract flies."

But all the time he knew that there had been no fly, and he was quite sure that she knew it too. She smiled again, and said, "About Mr. Finger — I'll see what I can do. But I'm sure it'll be no use."

"Thank you, Miss Arrup. Whether it's any use or not, I'm sure you'll do your best. And do you mind if I ask something personal?"

It turned out that Miss Arrup was doing nothing that night.

He called for her at her apartment, and when he put his finger on the bell, the tinkling sound stopped. She came to the doorway and greeted him absently. "Do you mind waiting for a moment or two?" she said. "I haven't finished my practicing."

Left alone, he tried to look around him, but he was hardly aware of what he saw. The important thing was what he heard. Miss Harriet Arrup played with maturity, with feeling, even with a passion that boded well for their having a happy time together. But what she played was still, *DA, da, da, da, DEE, da, da, da.*

He didn't dare tell her that, though. He complimented her on her musical ability, and she smiled with pleasure. "My teacher is sure I'll win a prize next week," she said. "Those of us who work for Blivins, Blevens or Murphy and Finger aren't allowed to enter the general contests, you know. But we have a special contest of our own."

"That's certainly a lucky break for you," said Rinaldo. And he wondered, now that she herself had broached the subject, whether he hadn't better continue with more questions about the Contest. Better wait till later, he decided. Better wait until we've established a more, shall we say, initimate relationship. Better wait until her defenses are down.

She talked later, but he learned nothing new, except that at certain moments it was a hell of a distracting thing to have a girl try to catch nonexistent flies. Not exactly a wasted evening, he thought, especially for a man who had been out in space alone so long, but still it brought him no closer to his goal of learning the origin of the Contest.

And during the next few days he learned definitely that Mr. Finger couldn't see him. Mr. Finger was far too busy, and he didn't need the publicity Rinaldo's book could give.

I'm up against a blank wall, he thought. A very thick and solidly constructed wall. I haven't got the strength to go through it, but maybe I can go around. Francis Finger is Jove, the official originator of the contest. But who put Minerva into Jove's head, perhaps while Jove wasn't looking? His daughter's playing? Nonsense. Advertising firms and counseling firms just don't think as spontaneously as all that in terms of billion dollar contests.

Harriet doesn't know, and she seems to think that Finger himself doesn't. But there are people who know more about a man than he knows himself. His private secretary, of course, but secretaries keep their lips buttoned. His wife, his mistresses if I could find them, his daughter . . .

His daughter.

Two days later, with Harriet's help, a word from Thrigman, and some contrivance of his own, he met little Joyce Finger. It was at an exclusive girls' school, where he had been invited to give an evasive and completely

out of place lecture on "My Two Years Alone in Space," and after the lecture he had answered questions. The object of the questions, from his point of view, was to get the kids to talk.

Joyce was eight years old, and a little shy and hesitant, as befitted a young girl whose father was always sparkling professionally and throwing off glittering ideas that put her own childish concepts to shame. Her nails, he noticed, were bitten to the quick. But Rinaldo was at his most paternal, and he felt genuinely sorry for the kid, and after a time Joyce warmed up, took a preliminary bite or two at her fingernails, and began to get a few things off her childish chest.

The subject she chose for conversation was one that made her important to the other kids. After all, her father was supposed to be the originator of the great Contest, the Contest for which all the other kids did their practicing. And it was her own practicing that had given him the idea. The contest composition was the very one she herself had been playing.

"My Daddy says I could win a prize easy, only it wouldn't be fair. I'm not allowed to play in the Contest."

"My, isn't that thrilling. Joyce, I hear that you're the one who gave your Daddy the idea."

"Daddy says I give him lots of ideas."

"My Mommy says I give *her* ideas," added another little girl.

"Not ideas like this one," said Joyce. She was the center of attention now, and she was determined to remain in that position. "Daddy says I used to drive him crazy with my practicing. Always the same thing, day after day. He says it was my fault he had to go to Dr. Clootz. But he says he don't mind it now. He says now I gave him the idea for a billion dollar contest, I can play anything, and he'll listen with pleasure. He says the Contest did him more good than Dr. Clootz did."

She was babbling on, but Rinaldo had stopped listening. Dr. Clootz was a well-known psychiatrist. Of course, any psychiatrist that Francis Finger went to would have to be well known. And who else knew things about a man that he didn't know himself — who else but a psychiatrist?

Rinaldo felt a sense of irritation at himself for not having thought of it sooner. It was part of the irritation he was now beginning to feel all the time. The irritation that came from that damned, endless tinkling.

Making an appointment with Dr. Clootz was a difficult task, and a breath-takingly expensive one. But Rinaldo had in his favor the fact that he had just come back from two years in space, and that Dr. Clootz might expect to be professionally interested in examining him. And while waiting for his appointment, he ran around and picked up many facts which he felt might be useful.

When he was finally ushered into the great doctor's office, he felt ill at ease. How do you go about picking the mind of a man who makes it his profession to pick the minds of others?

Dr. Clootz was of medium height, stocky, bald, the beard he cultivated brown and flecked with gray. His eyes were weak and watery, and he had a slight twitch of one eyelid. At the edge of the beard, his cheeks were ruddy.

Through the walls of his office came the omnipresent tinkling sound. "Ah, yes," he said on hearing Rinaldo's name. "Sit down, please. What is the trouble?"

"Dr. Clootz, as I told your secretary, I have just returned from two years alone in space. I find difficulty in adjusting to some of the changes I've encountered on Earth. Particularly to the endless playing of that goddamn piece everybody is practicing for the Contest."

"I sympathize with you. But if it is no more than that — have you tried anesthetic ear oil?"

"I used it for a few nights to go to sleep. I had to discontinue when I began to have ringing sounds in my ears. And even if it had no ill effects, I find the alternative between deafness and being driven to distraction not a pleasant one."

"You have a phobia about this practicing?"

"Don't you?"

"Please, we are discussing *you*."

"No, Doctor, that isn't what I came here for. There's nothing you can do to make that everlasting noise palatable. All I want to know is how this racket started."

The eyebrows went up, the effect of disapproval somewhat spoiled by the twitching of the eyelid. "I am sorry — I know nothing about that."

"I think you do. Don't try to pull your rank as a psychiatrist on me, Doctor. You were treating Francis Finger when he got the great idea. Did you plant it in his mind hypnotically?"

The eyelid twitched again. Dr. Clootz said, "My dear young man, what gave you that idea?"

"His daughter. She babbled. And it seemed more plausible than the explanation that everything just came to him out of thin air."

Dr. Clootz smiled. "It is absurd."

"Is it? You're a Venusian, Dr. Clootz, aren't you? Mr. Finger came to you, so apparently he has no great prejudice against Venusians. And yet, when the great thought struck his master mind — complete in all its details — Venus was one of the planets barred from participation in the Contest. How do you explain that?"

Dr. Clootz didn't seem disconcerted by the question. He said, "The

explanation is simple. Venus, like Mars and like Jupiter's moons, is not well populated. In many ways its life is still primitive. It would not benefit the sponsors to conduct their Contest among people who are too busy struggling for their existence to spend time playing the piano, or listening to the radio."

"But do the sponsors benefit from their Contest on Earth? It's costing a billion dollars, Dr. Clootz. What do their total sales amount to? How do they expect to get their billion back?"

"I am not informed about the financial details —"

"Most people aren't, or they'd smell something fishy. Could it be, Dr. Clootz, that this whole Contest is subsidized by some unknown source, working through one or two of the sponsors?"

Dr. Clootz looked at him mildly. "That is a strange thing to say."

"Maybe. But I've been doing a lot of thinking about this. I don't think the sponsors benefit from the Contest. Who does?"

"The public. Think of the good the money does when it goes to some poor unfortunate family —"

"Please, Doctor, don't nauseate me. All the public gains is a headache. Why, it's affected even you. Maybe you put the idea into Finger's head, but it's backfired as far as you're concerned personally."

Dr. Clootz said, "Again I must remind you, you did not come here to discuss *me*."

"I came to find out how this thing started. Who put you up to it, Doctor? Venus? Mars? A combination of the extra-terrestrial colonies?"

"You have strange thoughts."

"The strange thing is that no one else has them. Maybe I have delusions, Doctor — but you're the man to tell them to, aren't you? What I've figured out is this. The other planets are just building themselves up. They aren't so primitive as you'd have me believe — not if they can turn out finished psychiatrists — but their industries are just growing, and they're very susceptible to competition. And Earth's industries have been able to squeeze them out of profitable markets.

"Now, suppose they were to strike back — at the very source? It would be simple to cut Earth's production. Just drive a good part of Earth's population into a condition approaching insanity."

"We no longer use the word," said Dr. Clootz. "It has no scientific meaning."

"Never mind the word. The condition is there. You dangle a billion dollars in prizes before people's noses. And they can't help themselves, they reach for it — and go crazy."

"The incidence of severe neuroses," said Dr. Clootz, still being scientific,

"has risen tremendously. The incidence of psychoses only very slightly."

"All right, most of them just go *almost* crazy. Overall efficiency drops 20, 25 per cent. I've been looking at some of the figures, Doctor, and they tell the story. And the drop in efficiency enables Mars and Venus and the others to compete successfully."

"A very interesting theory. Unfortunately, you have no proof of it."

"I know that, Doctor. I just wanted your opinion about it."

"I can say only that your theory is as absurd as it is interesting."

"Doctor, how would you like to undergo a lie-detector test? How would you like to be questioned, with the use of the proper drugs and gadgets, by a couple of Earth psychiatrists who are just as expert at dragging things out of the human mind as you are, and have the upper hand?"

Dr. Clootz became motionless. Even the twitch in his eye seemed frozen in place. He said softly, "Your delusion goes to dangerous lengths. I can say only that if you were actually to try to carry out such a plan, the result would be unfortunate — for you. It would be easy to convince my colleagues that your period of loneliness in space has induced persistent hallucinations. I understand that some of them are described in the early chapters of your book."

"My book? My dear Dr. Clootz, do you mean that you've actually gone to the trouble to learn about me, and to get hold of those chapters from my book? You don't have to say another word. You have convinced me that you think I'm dangerous. You have convinced me that I'm right."

"You are shrewd," said Dr. Clootz. "You can reason. But your reasoning will not persuade anyone. Do you realize that Earth psychiatrists too are susceptible to the desire for sudden wealth? They have children, they want their children to win prizes. They too are being driven to distraction. If you try — as you think — to disillusion them, they will vent their anger upon you. And the ordinary citizen, who sees his hopes of a great prize threatened, will tear you limb from limb."

"I know that. People love their illusions. I won't try to take anybody's away. I just wanted to know the truth for my own satisfaction. I just wanted to make sure who was going crazy around here."

"The disease, you may be sure, will run its course."

"What is its course?" asked Rinaldo. "After a while, the old pianos will wear out under the pounding, and there'll be so many twitchy neurotics that nobody will be capable of constructing new ones. Then the disease will just die out naturally. Is that what you mean?"

"That is not what I mean. I am quite sure that the disease will die out before the pianos do. Meanwhile, did you know that many people have begun to leave Earth? The strain is telling on them. I personally am assign-

ing my patients to other psychiatrists. In a month I shall leave for Venus."

Rinaldo laughed at that, and his right foot began to tap. Dr. Clootz said, "You are being affected. I advise you to move to Mars or Venus also."

"No," said Rinaldo. He stopped tapping. "You're no musician, Doctor, so you don't get it. I was tapping in three-four time — waltz time — not the damned four-four of that piece. I'm pointing out to you that I'm *not* affected, that I can resist suggestion. That, at any rate, I've resisted it so far."

"I should still recommend Venus."

"Venus? No, thanks, Dr. Clootz, I can resist that suggestion too. I don't intend to hop out of a frying pan into Venus."

"From frying pan to Venus? Now I do not understand you."

"Maybe you're afraid to understand." Rinaldo leaned toward him. "Look, Doctor, you're being an optimist. A senseless optimist. What gives you the idea that the Venusians are any better than all the other damn fools who wear human form? What gives you the idea they could resist going for a billion dollars any more than terrestrials could?"

"This — this insanity would not be permitted on Venus."

"The word's unscientific. And the disease is going to hit Venus, and Mars, and every inhabited satellite in the System. You can't quarantine insanity, Dr. Clootz. Not when it comes with a billion dollar label. Sooner or later, the industrialists of Earth are going to realize what's been done to them. And they're going to hit back."

"They will be stopped in their tracks," said Dr. Clootz, and twitched twice, as if to emphasize the firmness of his intentions.

"You can't stop them. As you yourself have pointed out to me, try to take the chance for a prize away from the poor fools who are so busily chasing after it, and they'll tear you limb from limb, Ego from Superego. The same thing goes for Venus."

Dr. Clootz was silent. For a second he didn't even twitch.

"You get my point, Doctor," went on Rinaldo. "Maybe after a few years the insanity will die down, as you assume, on Earth. After that will come the turn of Mars, or Venus, and then the next planet, and then back to Earth again, and so on. When I was a kid," said Rinaldo, with what seemed at first irrelevance, "science still hadn't conquered the common cold. I'd catch a cold, my brother would catch it from me, and my father from him, and then it would come back to me again. Somebody in the family was always catching cold from some one else. But this is going to be a lot worse than an ordinary cold. And it's going to go on for at least a generation or two."

Dr. Clootz was pale. "My God," he groaned. "We should have known.

The atomic bomb, the hydrogen bomb, and now this — there never was a weapon that worked only in one direction. What shall I do?"

"Consult a good psychiatrist," said Rinaldo. "Me, I know what I'm going to do. I'm going back to my space station, or another one like it. I'm going to make sure that I'm well stocked up, that the food-manufacturing system is in good order, that I'll be completely self-sufficient for a lifetime."

"Alone?" Dr. Clootz roused himself and twitched gravely. "That is the sure way to develop a severe mental disturbance."

"I'll have my work. And maybe after a time I won't be alone. There's somebody I'd like to take with me —" He thought of Miss Arrup. "But I don't think there's much chance of it now. Not until after she wins one of those prizes, and can take time off from catching flies. I don't know how long that will require. But I'm going to leave her my address, and in a few years maybe she'll be willing to come on over and see me."

"You are still taking a great chance to be alone in space for so long."

"Not so big as you think, Dr. Clootz. I'm interested in my work. Didn't I tell you? It's more than a matter of making observations and keeping records."

"In the outline of your book, you indicate that your work was mostly routine."

"I know. The truth is a little too hard for the average reader to take. It would strike him as absurd, and a waste of government money, and in times like these — well, he'd yell to have it cut out. And that would mean cutting *me* out too. But we're scientists, Dr. Clootz, and as scientist to scientist I can talk frankly to you. Do you know what I'm doing? It's really something along your line."

Dr. Clootz frowned and twitched. "You treat mental aberrations while isolated in space?"

"I'm what you might call an astronomical psychiatrist. And I don't treat aberrations, I merely study them. I study the crazy asteroids."

"The which?"

Rinaldo grinned. "The name's disconcerting. As a matter of fact, it isn't quite scientific. Technically, they're known as AEEO's — Asteroids with Extremely Eccentric Orbits. But 'crazy asteroids' is good enough for every day use. They're tiny bodies, about two miles or less in diameter, and only four of them are known so far. They weren't discovered until recently."

"But why the unscientific name?" demanded Dr. Clootz.

"Wait till I tell you what they do. You know how ordinary asteroids travel — in ellipses around the sun, like those of the planets. Well, the crazy ones go along in much the same way their pals do — with one little exception. At a certain point in space, they loop the loop — and then go

on as if nothing had happened. Did you ever hear anything more insane in your life?"

"But why? Is the cause magnetic, or electrical, or due to forces not yet understood?"

" 'Due to forces not yet understood' covers it nicely. I'm trying to find out what those forces are. I'm also trying to learn why the number of loopy ones is increasing. The asteroids have been under observation for generations, and not until ten years ago was the first crazy one discovered. A very interesting phenomenon, Dr. Clootz, and it will help me remain in good mental condition. What better way is there to keep sane than to study insanity in others?"

A frown and a twitch. "Your antidote may not be as effective as you think it is," said Dr. Clootz heavily. "Judging from my own experience, there is no escape from danger in work alone."

"That danger I'll take. The danger of that diabolical Contest I won't. Well, thanks, Dr. Clootz, for all the information you've given me. It's been a pleasure talking to you. I hope Earth and the rest of the planets keep on having a nice economic war. Too bad about the casualties, but then you can't expect to have a war without casualties, can you?"

Dr. Clootz shook his head regretfully. And twitched.

The new space station was just like the old one. Built on a sane asteroid, not a crazy one. It was restful and comfortable. The work, fascinating at all times because of its objective, involved not too much routine, not too little. And none of that *DA, da, da, da, DEE, da, da, da.*

In the store room he stopped with surprise. Something new had been added.

A piano.

He looked at the Captain of the ship which had brought him. The man grinned. "The Contest has been extended to all the boys in space stations. They've got to be from Earth, of course — nobody from Mars, or Venus, or the others can get in."

"*Yet,*" added Rinaldo mentally. Aloud he said, "But why?"

"You know how most of them are. They can't take it being out here the way you can. This'll help keep them sane. There's a book of instructions, so that anybody can learn to play, whether he ever touched a piano before or not. And there'll be special arrangements for broadcasting your playing back to the judges on Earth. All the details have been worked out."

Rinaldo stared for a moment in silence.

The Captain said, "You didn't expect that, did you? Well, have a good time. I have to be getting along."

They shook hands, Rinaldo's mind still dazed. And then the ship was gone, and he was alone.

He stared at the piano. What a crazy idea. Very considerate, of course. The poor fellows out in space mustn't be excluded, they too must have a crack at that billion. It would be funny if he returned from space a millionaire, he thought. Very funny. Wouldn't Miss Arrup be surprised, if she could spare the time from practicing and fly-catching.

He picked up the instruction book. The prize tune looked as simple as it sounded. All it needed was five easy lessons. A kid could get to it in five weeks, a grown man with reasonable intelligence ought to master the notes in a day. And then there would come the months of practice, of sounding off, *DA, da, da, da, DEE, da, da, da . . .*

Almost as if hypnotized, he sat down. There was a keyboard chart right on the piano itself. You put your right hand here, your left here. These were the notes —

Suddenly, he stood up shuddering. He looked around, picked up the first heavy instrument his hands could find, a wrench, and hefted it carefully. It would do.

He brought it down in a graceful swing across the keyboard. As the imitation ivories leaped in alarm, he said to himself, "Easy, Rinaldo, easy. The piano won't run away. Let's not be hasty and crude about this."

He went on with his operation on the keyboard, quite calmly, almost casually. When he had smashed that, he turned his attention to the strings. Under his tender ministrations they ripped apart with the prettiest jangling noise he had ever heard. In four-four time.

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**Note:**

If you enjoy THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION, you will like some of the other MERCURY PUBLICATIONS:

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*We have, frankly, never been able to decide whether Lord Dunsany's incomparable Jorkens has traveled in more lands than Sir John Mandeville and witnessed more strange dramas than Dr. John H. Watson; or whether he is, like Saki's Vera, a specialist in romance at short notice. In either event, he is our favorite Club Counter-Bore; and we're more than happy to find him expatiating on a science fiction theme in this first American appearance of his latest narrative.*

# *Misadventure*

## *by* LORD DUNSANY

It was a cold and foggy day, and, though it was warm in the Billiards Club, we couldn't keep out the fog. "The sun is shining now," said Jorkens, "all over Africa."

It was the sort of remark that particularly annoys Terbut, who has not travelled; and swiftly, but, I must admit, adroitly, he twisted the conversation far from the wild lands travelled by Jorkens, and soon we were all talking of modern machinery and the latest improvements in lifts. Then Jorkens spoke again. "I should hardly call them improvements," he said.

"No?" said somebody.

And for a while no one spoke, and there was hardly promise of one of those stories from Jorkens, of which I am, I suppose, by now the principal recorder; or so Jorkens said to me the other day, though he may have said it in jest. And then the little silence was ended by Jorkens, and came back no more till he had finished his tale.

I knew a lift [he said] that was very greatly improved, judging by your standards, Terbut. But I shouldn't call it an improvement. No. What happened was that a hotel on the South coast had fitted in an improved lift. Again I use your terms, Terbut. I will not name the hotel, for there is doubt over the whole thing. A coroner's jury said one thing: I say another. But I am not going to challenge anyone else's opinion. Certainly not in public. And I am not going to spoil the business of that hotel, which was an extremely comfortable one and had the last word in everything. That was the trouble. Let me explain how it worked: you walked towards it and

there was some kind of electric ray, quite invisible, like what some jewellers have to sound an alarm if any hand goes within a certain distance of jewelry, and as you approached the lift it descended from any floor it was at and opened its doors to you. Another ray told it when you had gone in and it waited a few seconds for you to sit down, and then up it would go. It told you what floor you were coming to by an illuminated number and, as you walked to the doors, again it knew, and stopped at the floor you wanted and opened its doors again, and went on when you had got out. That is my rough explanation, so that you may know what was happening, though I knew nothing about it. But there were two other men in the lift with me when I went up in it one day, one of them knowing no more about it than I, and the other one knowing everything. The man who knew nothing about it was called Odgers: you may have read about him in the papers. I didn't know the name of the other, but later I heard somebody call him Jim. Well, Odgers was trying to shut the door of the lift and Jim was telling him that you didn't have to do that, and Odgers asked why not, and Jim said, "Because it can do everything for itself."

"What do you mean by everything?" said Odgers.

"Everything that a reasoning man can do," said Jim.

"Do you mean it can think?" said Odgers.

"Yes," said Jim. "Haven't you heard of an electronic brain?"

"But, but," said Odgers.

"Well, there it is," said Jim. "This lift and the air all round it are as full of electric rays as our brains are of similar impulses, and the lift responds to every one of them. If you don't call that thought . . ."

"I don't," said Odgers.

"Well, what floor do you want to get out at?" asked Jim.

"The third," said Odgers.

"It's coming now," said Jim. "Go to the door. It will know. You won't need to open it."

And, sure enough, all that happened. Odgers stood still in astonishment and did not go out. And there the lift stopped, waiting for him. For a while Odgers stood with his mouth open. And then he blurted out. "Tell it to go on."

I didn't see exactly what Jim did. He didn't seem to do more than wave his hand. But the lift went. Then they began to argue. Jim said what you said, that it was an improvement. Odgers said that the world was getting too much improved, and that the people in it were getting too clever to live, and that we were better off before we had all these machines.

"Don't talk like that," said Jim. "It can hear you."

We passed floor after floor, and I too stayed in the lift beyond the floor

at which I had meant to get out, listening to that queer argument.

"Hear me?" exclaimed Odgers.

"Yes," said Jim. "Don't you realize that there are many machines far more delicate than your eardrum, and as receptive of impulses as your brain and as well able to hear with them? If you tried to make a television set you would understand that."

"As delicate as our brains?" gasped Odgers.

"Yes, or a wireless set either," said Jim, harping back to his point about making a delicate instrument. "And it can hear you," Jim added.

"I don't see how they could make a thing like that," said Odgers.

"Well, I can only say," said Jim, "that it is easier to make than an eardrum."

And so they argued and we came to the top floor, and still no one got out. I must say I was agreeing with Odgers, and I think he saw my support, and it encouraged him to sum the argument up; and, though I had hardly spoken, I think the other man saw that I was with Odgers, which may have helped him to listen at first, though again and again he tried to stop Odgers from blurting out any more slanders against the lift.

"Well, all I can say," said Odgers, "is that machines are a damned nuisance and, if they can do all that you say, it's taking initiative away from men and will make them effete in the end like the Romans, and all who came to rely too much upon slaves. That's all they are, a kind of slave. They are a damned nuisance and I'd scrap the lot of them."

"Stop! Stop!" urged Jim. "It can hear you."

"I don't care if it does," said Odgers.

"It can. It can," Jim repeated.

"Does it know English?" asked Odgers.

And I must say I smiled at that, and Jim saw I thought that Odgers had made out his case against him.

"No," replied Jim. "But all the air in this little space is vibrating with what you are saying, and the tones of abuse or anger are very different from those of contentment or ordinary polite conversation. I tell you the air is vibrating with your abuse of machines. And it will do no good."

I didn't know what he meant by that. And Odgers did not seem to know either and would not stop his contemptuous abuse of the lift, and Jim warned him no more. "Well, I want to go to the fourth floor," he said. And down went the lift to the fourth and the doors opened and Jim got out; and, however he did it, he told the lift that I wanted to go to the third. When I got out, this man Odgers was still in the lift: it opened its doors for me with its usual politeness, and gently closed them behind me, and went purring away. What happened after that I can only guess, and my

guess may have been helped by a change in the note of the lift, a certain snarl that seemed to me to have come in it. There was this sensitive machine alone with the man that, when last I saw him, would not cease to insult it. It went back to the fifth floor, not the floor on which Odgers lived, and there must have opened its doors for him, but not for long. And Odgers must have tried to get out. And the doors clutched him. It carried him eight floors higher, that is to say, to the top. It must have done that last trip with furious velocity, for his body was found all mangled against the roof.

That is Jorkens' story, and we none of us tried to explain it. I have called it "Misadventure," because that was the verdict of the coroner's jury.

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## *Coming Next Month*

F&SF is particularly proud to announce that next month's issue (on the stands in early October) will mark the first appearance in these pages of Judith Merril, whose fine 1950 novel SHADOW ON THE HEARTH has recently been sensationally successful as a television-play under the title of *Atomic Attack*. Her new novelet, *Dead Center*, is a moving story of the intimate problems of the family left behind by the first moon-flyer; and I think you'll find in it the same immediate personal view of the impact of the future that has made SHADOW so justly famous.

The November issue will also contain *The Test*, a bitterly realistic picture of old age in the future which is one of Richard Matheson's most distinguished stories to date; *The Weissenbroch Spectacles*, the first chronicle of Gavagan's Bar which de Camp and Pratt have disclosed in some time, and one of the funniest yet; an unusual piece of medical science fiction by Clifton Dance, Jr., plus stories by Chad Oliver, Arthur Porges and others.

# *Recommended Reading*

*by* THE EDITOR

THE REGULAR PUBLISHING of science-fantasy has slacked off for the summer, as usual; and now, before the expected fall rush sets in, seems a good time to look at some of 1954's imaginative novels which were published (and usually reviewed) as straight fiction for the general reader.

In our field, as in that of the suspense novel, it's largely the caprice of the publisher that determines which way a book is presented; and as a result students of the art of the novel overlook many a book which they would enjoy, because it is addressed to the restricted science fiction audience, and devotees of s.f. overlook many a fine work of imagination because it is issued as "a serious novel." There isn't much to be done, at the moment, about the first oversight; one can only hope that the literary arbiters will in time realize that Bradbury is not a unique phenomenon. But the second oversight can be remedied if you'll look into the following books, all published "straight" and all ranking among the best science-fantasy of the year so far:

I don't know any author, in or out of the specialized field, who has had so much pure damned fun with ESP as Geoffrey Kerr contrives in UNDER THE INFLUENCE (Lippincott, $3.50) — the tale of a bank clerk who, at precisely the right point of insobriety, becomes an involuntary telepathic detective. This is actor Kerr's first novel (though not his first fantasy; I shall always be grateful to him for his collaboration with Robert Sherwood on that wonderful screen-play, THE GHOST GOES WEST), but an exceedingly able one, very much in the vein of the father of British light-and-logical fantasy, F. Anstey; and its adroit blend of humor, antic imagination and murder-mystery may remind you of Guy Cullingford's POST MORTEM.

Two British stories deal with the intricacies of time. Marghanita Laski's THE VICTORIAN CHAISE LONGUE (Houghton, Mifflin, $2.75) is a compressed and compelling novella of a time-warp which transports invalid Melanie Langdon of 1954 into the body of invalid Milly Baines of 1864, where she finds herself trapped in physical and emotional problems similar to her own, yet rendered wholly unlike by the difference in time and society. It's an admirably written book, highly skilled in its economic evocation of time, place and character — and a relentlessly terrifying one.

In THE MAGICIANS (Harper, $3), J. B. Priestley takes a more cheerful view of time and its possibilities. Priestley has been writing stories and plays of time for more than twenty years, exploring every variation suggested by J. W. Dunne, plus quite a few of his own. Here it is the concept that "a man is really all his time" and can learn to free himself from the "tick tock" temporal sequence and move in "time alive" — a concept made both convincing and attractive by a trio of half-comic elderly "magicians" who move into the life of a businessman at a vital time-crux. It's a strange story, with strong allegorical overtones, told in a readably down-to-earth way — almost as if one of Charles Williams' spiritual fantasies had been written by a level-headed Yorkshireman.

Gore Vidal's MESSIAH (Dutton, $3.50) is rather more pretentious than any of these and rather less successful, but still an absorbing piece of prophetic fiction. The young and prolific Vidal here recounts the growth, in the next 50 years, of a new religion, from its beginnings as another Southern California sect to its triumph as a tyrannical church-state. It's a religion based on "our race's will to death and, worse, to a death in life made radiant by false dreams, by desperate adjurations"; and I can't recall a creed in future fiction which has been created out of so minute a knowledge of the nature of myth and of theological history. Oddly for a novel purely literary in intention, the book is weaker in such fundamentals as construction and characterization than in its extrapolated thinking, which is of the first order.

The publishers of Thyra Samter Winslow's THE SEX WITHOUT SENTIMENT (Abelard-Schuman, $3.50) state that its eighteen stories are "for every taste . . . even a story of the seemingly supernatural." Actually it contains three out-and-out, non-"seeming" fantasies, two of them very good indeed. The fantasy completist will want to add to his list Sax Rohmer's RETURN OF SUMURU (Gold Medal, 25¢); like the insidious Dr. Fu Manchu, Our Lady Sumuru attempts world conquest by means science-fictional and supernatural as well as criminous — and the resultant melodrama is almost as entertainingly Perelmanesque as the exploits of the evil Doctor. THE DELUGE (Twayne, $3) is an unclassifiable oddment. Labeled "a novel by Leonardo da Vinci," it is neither a novel nor by da Vinci, but a novella-length apocalyptic vision by Robert Payne based on fragmentary da Vinci notes. It may be worth wading through Payne's tedious and erratic writing to find the few brilliantly vivid descriptive passages by da Vinci himself.

I have always maintained that the best object lesson in the construction of fantasy is the children's books of E. Nesbit; and I'm delighted with Edward Eager for confirming the point in his HALF MAGIC (Harcourt,

Brace, $2.75). Here is what may well be considered a new (yet purely American) Nesbit book, with a group of children who pass the summer vacation learning, through one contretemps after another, the strict rules of magic — in their case, an amulet which most annoyingly grants precisely half of one's wish. To be sure, it's a juvenile (and an Honor Book in the *Herald Tribune*'s Spring Book Festival); but I warmly commend it, not only for your children, but for your own reading when you're hungry for gay and charming, yet rigidly governed fantasy in the *Unknown* manner.

I cannot formally review Walt Kelly's THE POGO STEPMOTHER GOOSE (Simon & Schuster, $1); I hope any F&SF reader needs only to be reminded that there exists a new Kelly volume. Rabid Pogophiles can (and do) debate forever as to which are the greatest sequences; but I'm pretty sure that two of these latest entries are among the nominees: one in which our friends of the Swamp enact the Trial of the Knave of Hearts (with straight Carroll text), and a curious and powerful reinterpretation (without Pogo) of the Pied Piper legend. And for visual fantasy humor, do not miss FRENCH CARTOONS (Dell, 25¢), edited by William Cole and Douglas McKee and containing some of the most inspired improbabilities of François, Dropy, Chaval and other masters of absurdity.

Another nominally juvenile book (and indeed the winner of the *Herald Tribune*'s $200 Spring Award for the best book for boys and girls over 12) should be required reading for every intelligent adult: Willy Ley's ENGINEERS' DREAMS (Viking, $3.50). This is in no respect different from Ley's adult books; it has the same method (apparently patented by Ley for his own exclusive use) of easily readable, even charming exposition of the results of meticulously thorough scholarship, and his material is (if possible) even more absorbing than usual. These stories of the great uncompleted engineering projects (the Channel Tunnel, the Jordan Valley Project, solar power, etc.) are fascinating simply as stories; but they're also highly provocative in suggesting certain lessons — that scientific adventures and New Frontiers of the most exciting kind are possible in the future even if we never move into Space; that the extreme conservationist prophets of doom have overlooked the fact that we have countless power sources outside of our dwindling fossil fuels, sources never fully exploited only because it has been cheaper to go on using up our coal and oil; and, most important, that hardly a one of the countless projects enumerated (some of them sure to be necessary when our fossil fuels vanish) can be carried out without a political unity superseding today's nationalisms. In this thought-provoking entertainment, it looks as if Ley has once more cinched the International Fantasy Award for non-fiction.

# *Legends of War . . . and Women*

*Hear the phrase, "legends of war," and you instantly think of the Angels-of-Mons type of theatrical inspirationalism; but other and more intimate legends arise out of every conflict, legends which stress that the relation of the man in uniform to women is at least as important, to him, as his relations to the men in the other uniforms. Here F&SF brings you two modern legends, at once parallel and contrasting, of soldiers and women. The first, by the highly talented young Manx writer Nigel Kneale, is a tale as tenderly ironic as it is brief, with possibly the most pitiful ghost in literature.*

# *Peg*

*by* NIGEL KNEALE

"HALLO," PEG SAID to a nice boy with curly hair. "Like to take me for a walk?"

He walked past her. She ran and caught him up and patted his arm, but he didn't see her.

Peg sighed. He hadn't looked like he was thinking, or going any place in particular; he might have seen her.

Two women passed. They looked right through her.

"I give up! I give up!" said Peg. She shouted: "I can see you all. Why won't you see me? I don't get it!" An old guy selling fruit off a barrow never even looked up from his oranges. Oranges! That's something you didn't see in the blitz. Only the Joes sometimes had one in their pockets.

"Hi, soldier," she said. But the soldier had gone while she was putting her best smile on. Only a limey soldier, anyway, in his little sissy berry, yah! yah!

It was like a picture she once went to see with Lola. About some guy that was invisible. He could see people, but they couldn't see him; they could hear him though.

She yelled: "Then why don't somebody hear me? Folks do hear ghosts,

*Copyright, 1950, by Nigel Kneale*

don't they?" The words froze her; she must be in one of her crazy moods tonight, or she wouldn't have said it out like that: crazy to be seen by somebody.

She ran, swinging her handbag. It was just getting dark, and the shop windows were popping out bright patches on the sidewalk. Her bag hit an old guy right in the kisser, but he didn't notice; he just kept right on walking. She dodged between the figures. If they walked sort of through you, it made you feel funny.

She passed a broken shop, boarded up ever since the blitz. It was an old friend. There was nothing inside but burnt woodwork and rats. She had had a look.

"Hey, you cop!" A policeman stood on a corner, and Peg ran up to him and danced up and down, waggling her hips. "Why don't ya pinch me? I ain't got no identity card!" The policeman was watching a car across the road. She banged his chest and screamed, "Lousy bum! Call yaself a cop?" but it didn't even disturb a tiny fluffy blob of dust that had settled on the blue cloth.

She looked at the faces. Nearly all civvies. Jeeze, what a corny mob! The women had long dresses. That was crazy! Why, you couldn't see even a bit of their knees any more.

"I got nice knees. Hey, mister, ain't I got nice knees?"

Aw, does your momma know you're out!

Years and years it must be. They'd pulled down the shelters; she sat and talked to the men while they worked, but they didn't hear her. The old blackout was gone, the lovely, cuddly, crazy blackout. And the guns and the searchlights and the balloons.

Hardly ever a sailor, and no Joes.

Funny! It must be a long time, but you never noticed it. When you didn't have to eat and drink, it was like everything happened at once.

Jeeze, it could make you feel funny in the head! Only a minute ago, sort of, there was dark everywhere and those sons-of-bitches with the white helmets standing in their twos on the sidewalk, watching the Joes. And the Joes were everywhere, and up the side alleys you'd find them, chewing, a bit high, and smoking lovely smelling cigars; with their caps sideways and pockets full of gum and money.

"Lady," Peg said, "why don't you get wise to things? Your old man ain't coming home tonight — he's going to be my poppa!"

The woman went on waiting for her bus.

Old pig-face! She hadn't got a fur coat. Peg's was nice thick fur. She liked the feel of nice things. And that was a raw deal, too! She didn't exactly feel things now. She did. And at the same time, she didn't. Crazy!

She came to the Electric Park and went in.

Yow! Boy, this was the place! She always climbed on a pin-table to get out of the crush and see everything. Boy! The old juke-box singing, and the colored lights! It was just the same! The girls had boys, and there was rifle-shooting and prizes, and showing off and throwing money away! That was great!

She sighed.

The boys were only kids. Kids with prissy hair and their little shoulders padded to look tough. Why, you bet they felt big if they got just to kissing a girl.

These girls looked lousy anyway.

They didn't know anything; couldn't act the way a guy would want them. A lot of dough-faces.

The Joes would have raised the roof. They'd feed pennies into the machines for her and ask her name. She always told them a good one. Dolores or Sandra or Josephine. Never Peg. One night when she was a bit high she said Lola, and the Joes got the two girls mixed up. Lola was mad.

Listen to that music, will you! She stepped it out on the glass of the pin-tables, kicking her high heels in the solemn faces that stared at the numbers and the little chromium balls. "Hey, look!" She danced over the barrels of the little toy rifles, and along the counter of the soda-bar, kicking at the hands and glasses. "This is how we used to do it in the dance halls!" Her arms jerked. "When the Joes was here!" Nobody saw. She got hep and danced great and nobody saw.

Outside, she was angry. You couldn't cry. You can't cry without tears.

She kicked at a piece of paper, and made it dance along the gutter. Really the wind was blowing it, but she pretended.

There was the chemist's where she used to get lipsticks. Nice stuff that you wiped off and it left a lovely stain behind. Drug store, not chemist's. Drug store. Crazy little duck behind the counter must have mistaken her for somebody else. "Mother well?" he used to say every time. Like she was on an errand.

There was the milk bar with its big open front. Hardly any customers. An old guy with whiskers drinking pink stuff out of a glass. Pugh! And the big flash pub on the corner. They'd gotten wise to her after a bit, and it was no more gin for baby there. The Joes brought it out in bottles.

Two big guys got out of a car and went in through the chromium and glass door; it used to be plywood in the blitz days. Big dirty guys in swell overcoats. In some racket.

"Hallo. Got a match?" No luck. Another man went past without a look. You didn't really expect anybody to answer. It was just a game.

She stood watching the cars and buses and taxis.

Ever since she was little she liked to talk to people. She was quick; at school they all said she was. Just read things a couple of times, and she could say them by heart. Funny, she loved to talk so much and now nobody heard.

She looked across the road and saw — it couldn't be!

A Joe! A real live G.I.

Genuine stripes on his sleeve, and the little round U. S. badges on his lapels shining in the shop lights.

She ran through the traffic. "Hey, Joe!" she shouted. She felt she would burst, she was so happy. "Joe! Joe! Oh, I felt so lonesome, Joe! And all the time I knew there must be somebody else the same way I am!"

She reached him.

He hadn't turned. He was looking into a shop window, cigarette between his lips. A Lucky.

It was no good. She knew it suddenly.

She screamed into his face: "Joe! Look at me! You must be like me — you must! Answer! Answer!"

She hit at him and scratched the back of his tunic as he went.

"Goddam you! Oh — no! Joe! Come back!"

He stopped a few yards away and she saw him ask a man the way. So he must be a living Joe after all. They couldn't all have gone.

She came to the bare place they'd cleared after the block-busters. The empty space where the kids came to play. A little ball of dirty straw was being bowled over it by the wind. A rag of newspaper flapped.

It was where she had lived with Lola in the blitz; where she had been asleep the night the house caught it. The whole block had gone west in a few minutes. She often wondered where Lola was. Maybe she'd been in the house, too.

Little bits of iron and brick stuck out of the ground. Once, before it was trodden flat, she saw a brooch in the dirt where kids were playing. "Look there!" she had said to them. "It's genuine rolled gold." A Joe had won it for her from a crane-machine in the Electric Park; it took him seventeen tries.

But they didn't see the brooch, and now it had gone.

She stood and thought. There was no need to sit, because she never got tired.

These stupid kids would go on growing; she saw them. And they would get old and creep round with grandchildren. But she would always be just fourteen.

*And now that wonderfully wry individual, Will Stanton, brings you a very different and uproariously joyful story of soldiers and a girl, a true and vivid piece of modern (and timeless) folklore. "The legend itself," Mr. Stanton writes, "is one I think most GI's would recognize although I've never seen it in print before. I can imagine one of Caesar's legionnaires saying, 'So there I was standing on the Appian Way when along comes this* puella *in a cream-colored chariot . . .'"*

# *The Girl in the Flaxen Convertible*

*by* WILL STANTON

I WENT OUT to the local drive-in the other night with a friend of mine by the name of Al. There was a war picture playing. It started out pretty much like all the others — some character actor sitting on his bunk looking at the floor and a lot of recruits standing around discriminating against him. Then he and another fellow are out in the dark someplace, you don't know where because all you can see are the faces about 30 feet high. They talk in a kind of Academy-Award murmur that sets up vibrations all over the car. It never fails, I have to get the carburetor adjusted after one of these scenes. Anyhow, one of them asks the other if he's ever been out at night when the stars look like you could reach right out and touch them and it seems like there's a wonderful symphony in the air, and the other fellow says no, he never has. What he likes to think about is having a little place of his own and a wife of his own and kids of his own, and that's what he thinks it all means. I started up the engine.

Al reached over and turned the key. He said it was a good picture and he wanted to see how it came out. Well, the way it came out, all the fellows you thought were bad guys, why they turned out to be good guys, and there was some general that always showed up wearing riding boots because he wasn't quite bright enough to tie his shoes and he pinned medals on the whole bunch. Al blew his nose and slapped me on the back and said it sure brought back old times.

I got the car started again. "Al," I said, "we'll admit it was good whole-

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some entertainment, but when did you ever see a colonel's daughter that was stacked up like that girl in the picture, and could sing and tap dance and play the electric guitar?" Al said he'd seen plenty. Well, the only colonel's daughter I ever knew got thrown out of the K-9 Corps for biting one of the trainers, but Al and I had been in different outfits so I couldn't argue with him. I decided to take a different approach. "Al," I said, "I've got no complaints about the show. I just say there wasn't any realism to it. Now how about that scene where the tenor has to go on K.P. and the mean sergeant makes him peel that big stack of potatoes?"

"How about that!" Al said. "Boy, that happened to me dozens of times."

I gunned the engine once or twice, but I didn't say anything. The Army has got machines to peel potatoes; they've had them for twenty years. Al ought to have known that much. At the same time I can't blame him because I see it going on all over the country — ex-G.I.'s from Silver City, New Mexico, rooting for the Brooklyn Dodgers, and men from the yam and turnip country stuffing themselves on blueberry pie. The folks in Hollywood call it customer identification, but I say there's a difference between what's true and what isn't, even if nobody remembers it anymore. I knew a fellow in the Army, and his ideal was to have a bachelor apartment right in the middle of New York City. He wanted to get up at noon, have two glasses of milk punch and a dozen blue points and then go down and help cast a musical comedy. At that time he was speaking for a pretty large segment of the Armed Forces, but now Hollywood has sold us all down the river for a little chicken farm and a membership ticket in the P.T.A. Sure, the movie people will say I don't know what I'm talking about. They'll tell you that if I didn't habitually associate with the rowdy element I might be in a better position to judge. That's probably true, but it has no bearing on the situation. Men in the Army used to have certain things they were interested in, and they had their own way of expressing themselves. If all this is to be abandoned now, then in my opinion the culture of our country is going to be the poorer for it. Of course, I'm talking about the old Army. I can remember back in Texas in the early part of the war . . .

They called us aviation students, but we didn't study anything because there weren't enough schools to accommodate us. So what we did mostly was lie around the barracks and drink bootleg whisky and talk. We could have bought our liquor retail by hitchhiking to Amarillo, but that didn't seem right to us somehow. As potential officers we had a certain position to maintain. Besides, it wouldn't have been fair to the privates and corporals who smuggled in the stuff. The spirit of free enterprise is just as sacred in the Army as elsewhere.

Doing as much talking as we did, naturally we got pretty good at it. We'd start off early in the morning while we were still in bed, about 8 o'clock. Usually some farmer who had been up since 6 would come back from breakfast, patting his stomach. Then somebody in one of the bunks would open an eye and start asking questions — was the mess hall still open? — any hot water in the showers? — how was the weather? — coffee any good? — and so on. And the farmer would say the weather was fine — chow was good — coffee was good — not much of a line — everything O.K. By that time everybody would be awake and listening and the first fellow would say, "By the way, what did you say your middle name was?" And the farmer would blink and gape and give his middle name — we'll say it was Hector. Then the first fellow would say, "Well, Hector, you taxi back to the chow hall and tell the mess sergeant I said the hell with it." We went through this routine about five mornings a week.

Probably some people will say it wasn't much of a tradition for a crack Army unit. Maybe not, but traditions were scarce in those days, and we cherished what we had. Afternoons we used to hang around the P.X. or the service club and discuss local gossip and rumors. Sometimes the post was going to be inactivated in 48 hours and moved to Montana. Other times the C.O. had got lost on a weather hop over the field and some tech sergeant had to go up in a Cub and bring him in. Or else it would be the new counterespionage school in Lincoln, Nebraska — the one that trained men to hang around poolrooms and dance halls near defense plants and watch for spies — things like that.

But the best talk came in the evening — the story hour. All the stories were pretty much the same, but that didn't matter to us. The way they all started out, some fellow would be standing on the corner in Denver or Albuquerque or Louisville when up drives this blonde in a blue Cadillac. Well, sir — and we would lie back and nod and light cigarettes, already miles away. You take a kid that knows the three bears backwards and forwards, he still gets a big kick when the old bear says, "And here she is yet." Well, that's the way we felt about it.

I did try a little variation one evening, but it didn't turn out so well. I was telling about a corner in Trenton, New Jersey, that I had been standing on when a lanky brunette came up driving a '34 Nash. We went out to her place and sat around with her folks, playing parchesi until 11, and then I took a bus back to camp. I thought I told it modestly enough, but it didn't seem to set very well with the other fellows. The trouble was, I guess, that our stories were generally considered to be common property, and mine not being on a very high plane they thought that it was a reflection on the group as a whole.

Probably the only fellow in the barracks who didn't see anything unnatural in it was Howard Loessing. It may have brought back fond memories to him — I can't explain it any other way. He was from Indiana, North Forty, or some such place, and in spirit he had never left home. If he just crossed the barracks you'd swear he was walking on plowed ground. I saw him slouch past an M.P. captain one time, and the expression that passed over the officer's brutal features was not so much one of anger as of betrayal.

Loessing was almost completely hairless and built along tubular lines like that old tire advertisement. His eyes were close together, and he had a great beaked nose that he used to talk through whenever anybody happened to give him a kind word. Then he would take out his wallet and pass around pictures of his uncle and the head of the 4-H Club. In the evening he would sit on his bunk and write them letters — six or eight pages at a time. Well, this particular evening something I said must have started a chain of memories, it seemed that because Loessing looked up from the letter he was writing and listened, and then it seemed that he, too, had a story to tell.

He had been stationed at Santa Ana and on his first week-end pass he went into L.A. He started out on a sight-seeing bus and halfway through the trip he got separated from the rest of the party. You or I couldn't have done it, but things like that came easy to Loessing. He started walking — so many furrows to a block, so many blocks to a quarter section. Whether he was headed for the base or back to Indiana he didn't say. He hadn't covered but a few miles when the convertible pulled up beside him and the girl asked him if he wanted a lift. He noticed she had straw-colored hair that just matched the car, and then he must have blacked out, because the next thing he remembered she had turned into a long driveway up in the hills and parked the car. It was quite an impressive place with an indoor pool and movie-projection room and other such luxuries. In fact he thought at first it was some kind of country club and was half expecting a crowd of people to show up and maybe throw him out. But he didn't see anybody else the entire week end, and the way Loessing told it, they had themselves a real genuine picnic.

The bar was stocked with kirsch, among other things, and stout, Pernod, Chianti — he'd never heard the names before, but he tried them all. I guess he figured he might never get a chance to live so high up on the hog again. Then there was a library with all kinds of remarkable books in it, and oil paintings every place you looked — some comical and others more on the artistic side. As a matter of fact there was nothing he'd ever thought of that wasn't there for the asking and more besides — pork chops for breakfast with cream gravy and two kinds of pie — anything you might care to name.

Well, first off they went down to the pool, and I presume Loessing must have appeared bashful and uneasy, because the girl got some kind of a leopard suit and made him put it on and they played Tarzan and Jane for a couple of hours. By that time he was about as waterlogged as a cypress stump, so they went to another place and the girl put on a sergeant's outfit — not Wac, but a regular Army uniform with long pants — and she taught him a game called Spin the N.C.O. It is just such little touches that make all the difference to the boy away from home — something the U.S.O. and the others have never seemed to understand. Anyhow, on Sunday night she drove him back to camp and that was the last time he saw her. He would have written, but he hadn't thought to get her name.

That's all there was to the story. Loessing went on to finish his letter and the rest of us didn't say anything, then or later. Evenings we would lie on our bunks, staring at the ceiling, and after a while one of the fellows would give a sigh. But not Loessing — he never seemed to notice any change. I think it gave some of us kind of an uneasy feeling to be dreaming about his girl while he was writing to some farmer in Indiana, but there wasn't anything we could do about it. I did stop by his bunk a couple of times to admire his uncle's picture — I think he appreciated that.

It was about that time or shortly afterwards that I got shuffled into a new outfit, and the scene shifted to a town somewhere in France. It was a good-sized town, more like a city actually, and by this time most of the Germans had left, so we were able to carry on the war without too many complications. Every once in a while we would organize a trip up to the front, or anyhow close enough to hear the shooting and buy souvenirs to send home. Prices were high, of course, but we had our overseas pay and flying pay and some of the men set up small businesses on the side and we managed to get by. They issued us ribbons to wear and combat boots, and Paris was just over the horizon.

Then there was an evening that found eight or ten of us sitting around our quarters. We had been playing a game with some dice that weren't all they might have been, and our morale was low.

Somebody had liberated a couple of bottles of cognac and we drank that and told a few lies, but there wasn't any feeling in it, at least not until Cliff Turpin began to tell his story. He was a bandy-legged chap with a sloping forehead and a slight speech impediment, but he never borrowed money or molested anybody and he made a good officer.

I wasn't paying much attention to what he said, something about Irish highballs and eating chicken and waffles for breakfast, and then he mentioned a girl who wore a major's suit and suddenly the battlefield faded from my mind and I was in California again. I never even thought of Loes-

sing at the time — it was more like I was reliving some dream. The same honey-colored car was there, the same house, the same girl, and I was somewhere in the background, partly looking on, partly remembering. When he had finished there was no comment. I glanced around the circle of cynical, hard-bitten faces and I could tell that Turpin's words had touched them more than any one of them cared to admit. As the poet has so rightly said — "Tho' the boys be far away, they dream of home."

That was the last I ever heard of her. It's strange too, because you'd think of her as the type that would become a legend. I've talked to a lot of veterans who were stationed on the West Coast — mostly the high-octane boys with the 50-mission caps and the gaucho boots. Some of them from what I could gather had been shot at by half the husbands in Beverly Hills, but none of them had known her — only Loessing and Turpin, only those two humpty dumpties. And yet I feel sure that there must have been others — and maybe there are more today.

I don't want to appear sentimental, but out of what we call the American way of life, to me she symbolizes what is noblest and best. I like to think of her as a sort of beacon, standing on the bluffs near Santa Monica, perhaps, waiting there in the fog with arms outstretched — not for heroes, not for the ones surrounded by glamor, not for the well-loved, but for the stumbling ones, the misplaced and bewildered, the ones with nothing to recommend them but a shy smile and their awkward need.

Her car would not be so golden any more; it would be tarnished and battered by the years. She, too, would be getting on — in her middle thirties if I judge correctly. Still, some things, they tell us, can never change — her comic understanding, her steadfast immorality, her all-embracing tenderness. Sometimes I get to thinking, if I were a young man again, but then . . .

No, I shall never see her, never even know her name. I have enjoyed remembering her and I am proud, and that is enough. She will always be dear to me, she and her shabby little band of loved ones. Wherever they may be I wish them well.

*The power of Alfred Coppel's writing has recently burst upon the reader of general fiction with the publication of his hard-hitting novel of auto racing,* HERO DRIVER (*Crown*). *That story is based on intimate personal experience; but s.f. readers have long known that Coppel can lend the same quality of seemingly firsthand vigor to probable situations of the future, as in the well-remembered* The Dreamer (*F&SF, April, 1952*) *and* Mother (*F&SF, September, 1952*). *After too long an absence from these pages, Mr. Coppel returns with a forceful and bitter story of the ultimate implications of carrying earthly power politics into space.*

# *Mars Is Ours*

*by* **ALFRED COPPEL**

ILLUSTRATION BY NICK SOLOVIOFF

THE RED DUNES woke to the morning sun. The stars dimmed, but did not fade before the dawn. Light touched the mare's tails of high ice clouds and turned them pink against the great cobalt sky. To the far west, the eroded hills along the edge of Syrtis came alive with brilliant yellows and sere browns.

The long column of armored vehicles, insect-like in the vast emptiness, inched northward. The sound of their engines faded quickly in the thin, cold air and the drifting iron sands swiftly covered the tracks of the steel cleats.

Marrane woke from fitful slumber in his tank. The tiny reading light was still on and the book of plays lay open across his chest. He glanced at the clock in the footing of the tank and wondered if he had slept at all.

He rubbed a hand across his stubbled face and fought down the familiar clamoring terror of waking. He forced himself to lie back and relax, letting the undulating movement of the Weasel soothe him.

— this is real, he thought. Steel and rivets and the steady chugchugchug of the air compressor. Forget the nightmare of sticky, fear-ridden plains stretching out and out forever. *And lay off the luminol.*

He felt sodden with the residue of the drug, thick in the mouth and eyes with it. Corday would have to give him something else. He was building a

tolerance for luminol and it wasn't driving away the nightmares. Corday would have to come up with something different. Something out of a bottle to buy a few hours rest and sleep without dreams. He couldn't lead men into battle feeling this kicked out inside —

The communicator light flashed.

"What is it, sergeant?" he asked heavily.

"0600 hours, Major." Grubich's voice sounded tinny through the grill. "We're starting to climb the shelf. You asked me to call you."

"Very well, sergeant."

— out of the coffin, he thought. Out of the coffin and back to life. For God's sake *why?* Another endless day crawling across the endless, featureless desert. He thought of blue lakes and the sea again. How long had it been? Years now. Not that it mattered.

He slipped on his respirator and decompressed the tank. The latches didn't stick, thank God. He had a horror of that happening.

The interior of the Weasel was icy and Marrane shivered naked on the pitching deck. He wondered about shaving and decided against it. What water there was would be frozen and he had no decent blades left. The power shaver had been ruined by the sand months ago crossing Syrtis. All supplies were getting short — like sand running out in a glass. They'd have to make contact soon or the Task Group would fall apart of its own dry decay. *All hail the conquerors —*

Grubich stuck his cropped head around a bulkhead and asked: "Did you say something to me, Major?"

"No," he said sharply. "Carry on."

Grubich's head vanished with a muttered: yes, *sir.*

Marrane dressed slowly. Each movement seemed an effort. He wondered whether it was the dry cold and the low pressure and the canned air. Or was it himself?

— I'm 30, he thought. Not old. But I feel old. Tired and sticky, somehow, and when I look out at the desert, I feel very small.

He thought of the play he had been reading last night. One of the proscribed authors, but it didn't seem to matter much up here. Graylist, Blacklist. The Loyalty Boards. They all seemed far-off and unreal across the gulf of night. But the play had troubled him. Steinbeck, or some such name. And the title so apt as the line of Weasels crawled their way across the Martian plain through the star-shot darkness. *The Moon Is Down.* About invaders in a war that was forgotten now in a place he'd never heard of. Yet there was a frightening phrase in the play. One that brought on the nightmare again in spite of the luminol. Perhaps it had been wise to keep such a book out of the hands of civilians.

He shook his head wearily. It showed the way discipline was breaking down in the Task Group when an officer could lend a Graylist book to his commander without a twinge of conscience or fear. But my God, he wondered, what else can be expected after ten months on this desert looking for a Cominform Base that might not even exist. He told himself that he must remember to thank Hallerock for lending him the book.

From the galley came the smell of burning synthetic proteins. The stoves never had worked properly here under seven pounds air pressure. Nor had the engines — gasping for breath in spite of all the huffing and puffing of the superchargers. Nothing worked properly. Nothing but the guns. And there was nothing to shoot at.

— all hail the conquerors, he thought again, sardonically. Mars is ours. Marzizarz. It made just as much sense that way and it had the sound of officialese. He found himself smiling idiotically at the thought, Marzizarz.

"Crest ahead, Major," Grubich called.

Marrane stopped smiling and finished dressing hurriedly. His heart was pounding when he took a grip on himself.

— I'm going sand-happy, he thought, and so is every other man in the Task Group. Something basic was wrong with all this — the military vehicles trekking endlessly across the face of a world that had been quiet and dead and at peace for ten times ten million years. We should have come here for some *other* reason, he thought.

He stumbled onto the bridge and stood behind Grubich and the driver.

Behind the lumbering 200-foot machine, he could see the rest of the group strung out behind, following blindly across an endless wasteland of iron sands, radar antennae rotating with idiot military precision, searching for an enemy where none but the bitter frozen land could be seen.

He checked the course and climbed to the navigation deck, his boots gritting on the sand that drifted everywhere in the Weasel. He checked the guns as he went by, making sure they were muzzled and protected against the abrasive rusty filth.

At the chart table he checked the column's position with young Hallerock, a gaunt and skeletal caricature of the trim officer who had left Mars Base almost a year ago.

— this patrol has to end soon, Marrane thought, the men can't last much longer.

"Sparks got the radio fixed last night, Major," Hallerock said.

Marrane's eyes widened. He felt an illogical stab of anger. "Why wasn't I told?" he asked.

Hallerock refused to meet his eyes. "We couldn't raise Mars Base, sir. And Captain Corday said you shouldn't be disturbed until we could."

"I see."

Hallerock looked oddly at him. "Do you, sir?"

"They can't be guarding our channel all the time," Marrane said. And even as he said it he knew it wasn't so.

"We've had no contact for three months, Major," Hallerock said unsteadily.

"And what does that mean, Mister?" Marrane asked frowning.

Hallerock didn't answer. In the stillness the thrumming beat of the engines was all that lived.

— no, Marrane thought, don't say it. Don't even think it. They'd not leave us here. And then: if they hadn't been so damned frugal with the equipment it might have been different. It was insanity to send a column out on patrol with only the lead Weasel equipped to contact Base. But equipment cost money. And all the money went into the pounds of plutonium and lithium hydride that rested quiescent in the once shiny now rusty shells waiting to be fed to the guns. The killing matériel was ample, it was only the saving stuff that was in short supply.

"How far have we come, Mister Hallerock?" Marrane asked brusquely.

Hallerock tapped his charts. "Nine thousand miles, sir. We've quartered almost all of Syrtis and a good bit of Solis, too."

Marrane's mouth felt dry. "How far are we from Mars Base now?"

"Eight hundred miles, Major," Hallerock said, and then added: "Within easy radio range."

"Has Sparks picked up the beacon?"

"No, sir."

Marrane fought back the clamoring fear. "They are probably keeping radio silence. Things may have worsened back home."

"Yes, sir. It might be that."

The commander turned from the gaunt face to look out at the iron sands. The Task Group was approaching a line of low hillocks, windworn rock outcroppings covered with lichens. Reefs of a long-ago sea.

— old, he thought. Empty. And alone. The end was getting near. Another 800 miles and Mars Base. They had to be there waiting. The thin spire of the ship pointing at blue lakes and the sea. Just 800 more miles of silence and desert and silted, dead canals. And an end to the hostility of the silent land. They couldn't have deserted us, Marrane thought. They *couldn't* have done a thing like that.

He turned away toward the bridge and stopped suddenly. "Thanks for the book, Evan," he said.

"You read it, sir?"

"I read it."

"We're flies, aren't we?"

Marrane frowned at the drawn face. "You'd better see Corday," he said.

Hallerock laughed, the sound was eerie though the filter of his respirator. "We've conquered the flypaper. Remember *The Moon Is Down?* You did read it?"

"I read it, Mister," Marrane said. "We haven't conquered anything. Not yet."

Hallerock rose unsteadily, rocking on the balls of his feet. There were tears running down his cheeks and he shook with unholy mirth, but he wasn't making a sound. Marrane stood looking at him, numb with shock, knowing his navigator was mad.

They were standing so when the battle alarm shrieked through the steel labyrinth of the Weasel.

"Get to your station, Mister," Marrane shouted at the navigator. Hallerock sat down again and started sobbing.

"Major Marrane!" It was Grubich calling from the bridge. "A contact, sir! Russkis just over the hill! We've found the nest of them!"

"Stay put, Evan," Marrane ordered and ran down the companionway, his steel-shod boots ringing on the deck.

The gunners were unlimbering the guns and Marrane slipped into the conning tower, buckling on his headset.

"*Plan B. Weasel Able to Group. Plan B.*"

Grubich was at his side, binoculars extended. "They're just over the ridge, Major. We almost stumbled into them."

Marrane cursed the thin air of Mars that wouldn't support aircraft. The Cominform Base was in defilade and the Group would have to spread out along the ridge to bring the enemy under fire. An armored attack against fortified positions without air support was always deadly.

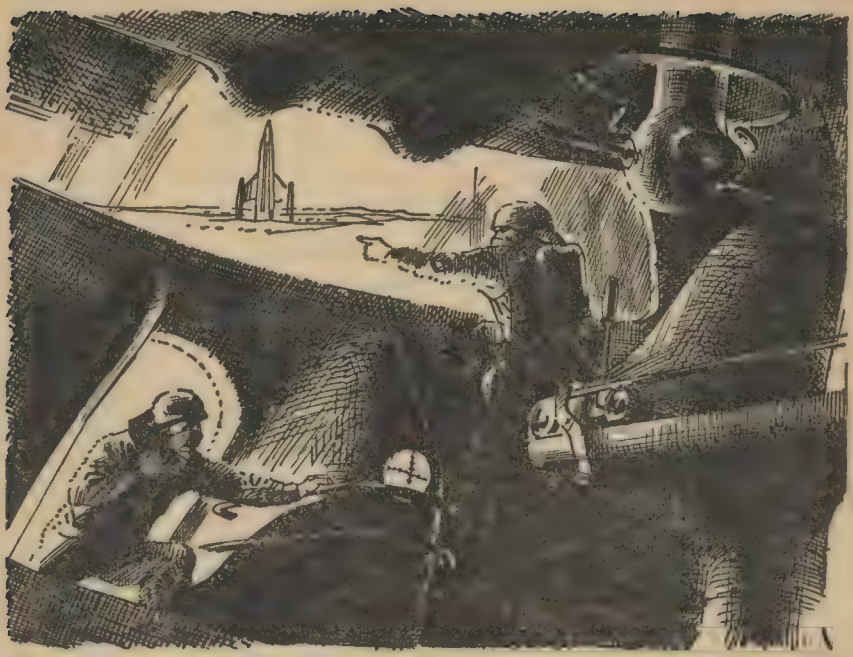
— nothing can go wrong now, he thought bitterly. Not here, so close to home. And then the torturing doubt began eating at him. Was there still a Mars Base? Maybe the Russki had wiped it out. Raw hate was tearing at his insides, but he felt alive for the first time in almost a year.

The Weasel crawled up the ridge and stopped just short of the top. "Scouts out," Marrane ordered. "Team Six."

A squad of Marines tumbled out of the last Weasel in the column of six and started over the crest in a skirmish line.

The squad leader's walkie-talkie cut through the static in Marrane's headset. "No hostile action, Major. I see a group of prefabs and a few light tanks. There's quite a bit of milling about. I think we have them cold."

The memory of years of soldiering rose up inside Marrane to clamor a warning. One couldn't be sure. Intelligence was always faulty. The evidence



of one's own eyes could be a lie. Maybe there was a Russki tank column just under the hillcrest to the north. Waiting. This could be an ambush.

"Let's see," he muttered. "Have the forward elements move up. Weasel Charlie to load fissionables. Dog and Baker into line abreast on the ridge."

Am I being too cautious, he wondered. Have all these endless weeks of sand and stillness drained the marrow out of my bones? We can strike quickly and win. He felt a sudden hysteric laughter bubbling just under the surface of his mind. The Cominform Base was under their guns. Grouped like a field problem around the blackened field where the Russki rocket towered over the shabby buildings. Ground zero. Epicenter. The terms from the field manuals were so inexpressive, he thought vaguely. What did ground zero have to do with a fireball at a million or two degrees centigrade? Maybe the zero part made sense. Zero for the Russki and it would be ended. Marzizarz marzizarz — *stop it!*

He dug his hands into the pockets of his parka, clenching his fists, letting the pain of his fingernails on the palms steady him. He could see the people pouring out of the prefabs to look at the line of Weasels that had materialized out of the dark morning on the ridge.

— they're helpless, Marrane thought.

He could hear his orders being relayed to the Task Group. Weasel Charlie was complaining of some trouble with its fission bomb. Marrane fought down his irritation and let Charlie finish the report.

"How long to clear your trouble?" he asked.

The radio crackled with static.

"How long, God damn it?"

"Ten minutes, sir."

Ten minutes. What were ten minutes in ten years — twenty? He could give them ten minutes of life, he thought, looking down at the frightened figures on the sandy plain. Odd, he thought. They look almost human. Strange to see something so familiar in this endless, whispering desolation.

The Marines were spaced out along the ridge in a skirmish line, digging themselves into the sand as though expecting an attack by infantry. We go by the book, Marrane thought. We always go by the book. And the men who wrote the book went by the book, too — and so on, down the endless mirrored halls of time back to Cain killing Abel and even beyond that to the ancestral memory of grisly delight as stone axe crushed blood and bones into the slime.

"Tank moving up, Major," the squad-leader called.

— time, Marrane thought. Ten minutes and we'll be done with this. "Track it," Marrane said to the gunpointer. "Weasel Charlie — how are you coming?"

"Getting it cleared now, sir."

He wondered briefly if he should have assigned Dog or Baker to fire the fission shell — but no, this playing with time was oddly appealing. And if there were a Russki column coming up, it would give them time to arrive and share in the warmth of the fireball. Risky, very risky. Not according to the book. Blacklist, Graylist, Marzizarz. God, how tired I am, Marrane thought.

"White flag, sir," said Grubich.

"Stay on them," Marrane said to the gunpointer. "Able to Group. Lay your guns on the camp, but hold your fire until we see what's happening here. If anyone makes a move toward that rocket, blast them. Able to Charlie. How much longer?"

"Five minutes or less, Major."

He stood indecisively, weighing life or death. Why the white flag? Bargaining for their lives? With what? He had them cold. The book said kill them wherever you find them.

He glanced at Grubich. The sergeant's eyes were intent on him. How would this hesitancy look to a Loyalty Board? Bad — very bad.

"Fire when ready, Charlie," he said slowly.

"Yes, sir."

"The book always wins, Grubich," he said. "Did you doubt that?"

"I'm afraid I don't understand the Major," Grubich said.

Life or death, Marrane thought. I can still play God. I could change my mind.

No one moved in the camp. The tank rumbled up the slope, red sand streaming from its cleatracks. Its long gun was pointed at the ground and a white steamer fluttered in the thin air. It reached the skirmishers and two heavily padded figures dismounted.

"Bring them in," Marrane ordered.

Somewhere, up on the navigation deck, he imagined he could hear Hallerock still sobbing. Flies conquering flypaper —

The two Russkis, masked against the cold and clumsy in quilted uniforms, clambered through the hatch. Marrane saw the smaller of the two wore the collar tabs of a colonel. The colonel's companion was a sergeant, armed.

"Get that burp-gun," Marrane snapped.

Grubich snatched the weapon away and pushed the Russki into a corner of the bridge.

"Get my tank ready, Grubich," Marrane said. "We'll talk inside."

"Recorder, too, Major?"

"Yes, get it all down." Since there was room only for two in the sleeping tank, it wouldn't do not to have a permanent record of everything said that could be run off for the Loyalty Boards back home.

— home, Marrane thought. Blue lakes, the tossing green of the open ocean —

He gave fire control to Wilson in Weasel Dog and led the way to the tank. Grubich stuck the muzzle of the burp gun hard into the Russki sergeant's middle. "You stay put, you red bastard."

The colonel seemed about to protest, but apparently thought better of it and followed Marrane into the tank. Marrane started the compressor. When the pressure stood at eleven pounds he removed his mask and indicated the Russki should do the same. He watched the operation, letting his hand rest on the icy grip of his automatic. Suspicion, he thought. The book says they're treacherous. One move and I'll blow a hole in the bastard's head.

The mask came away and Marrane sat looking at a woman of about thirty. A thin face, with high cheekbones and hollows under them. A tired face, with reddish, sandy grime worn into the skin, pale eyes and prematurely gray hair.

"I surprise you, Major?" She spoke English with only a faint accent.

"Not really."

"No," she said. "There are few taboos left on our side of the line."

"Very enlightening," he said. "Are we here to compare political systems?"

She shook her head slowly. "Why are we here?"

— I can't answer that, Marrane thought. There's the recorder to think of. And even if there were not — what could I tell her? That war is part of the intercourse of the human race? Should I quote Clausewitz to her? Here? Thirty million miles from lakes and rivers, from home —?

"Your base is under my guns," he said.

— that's according to the book, he thought. Formal. Stern. And a hundred yards away, the rusty shell casing would be in the lift, its blunt nose seeking the breech of Charlie's rifle, caressing the lands and grooves, tasting them voluptuously with its fuse, feeling the eager grains of powder behind it as the breech lock slammed shut and the gunpointer spun his oily wheels and the muzzle came up searchingly, ready to spit the fireball at a mass of flies trapped on an endless plain of blood-colored flypaper —

He glanced at his watch. Two minutes. Certainly not more. She caught his meaning and bit her lip. "You can't," she said. "Surely you can't. We are surrendering."

— but the Task Group wasn't equipped to take a surrender, Marrane thought. It was equipped only to destroy. To carry out its Directive. Blast the Cominform Base.

"Give the order not to fire. Tell your men we are their prisoners," the colonel said hoarsely.

"I cannot accept a surrender," Marrane said. It was as though another voice other than his own had spoken. Astonished, he felt his hand tighten on the grip of his pistol.

She looked down at the weapon. "But no, you would kill me? Why, in God's name? I came to you under a white flag to surrender my command? Is there no way I can touch you?"

"You can try. I haven't seen a woman in almost a year —"

— time, one minute now. Or less.

She pulled off her helmet and unbuttoned her tunic. She was a handsome woman in spite of the weariness and the grime.

"It won't do any good," he said.

Her hands dropped wearily into her lap. She seemed drained of life. Her eyes opened again and she saw the book of plays on the still-rumpled bed. "Steinbeck — an angry man," she said.

"He seemed to be," Marrane said. "He hated anything that destroyed human dignity."

She began to laugh, soundlessly, as though the spasms were painful.

"We've come so far."

"Far?"

"Yes, far. Far enough to forget what it was that we were sent here to do." She was shaken by a sudden shudder, as though she had looked into the face of chaos. "I wish I had forgotten it sooner. Oh, God, how I wish I had forgotten it sooner!"

— either she is mad, or I am, Marrane thought.

"We came here so full of hate," she said. "But what does it matter? We are only men and women against the bitter land. Can you forgive what I have done? Can I, I wonder?"

— this is all wrong, Marrane thought, I shouldn't have these doubts. But maybe it was more than just doubt. Maybe war had no place here on this silent, empty, world. We should have come here to do something better than kill. But we are in a cul-de-sac, trapped by what we are.

They sat close together in the tiny tank, listening to the chugging of the air compressor.

"Give the order," she whispered. "While there is still time."

— yes, he thought. Yes. I'll give the order because she's worn and as sick of this icy loneliness as I am.

She moved closer to him.

"Major — Major!"

He scarcely heard Grubich's voice, frantic in the speaker grill.

"Don't listen," she said softly.

"*Major!* We've picked up radioactivity. The stinking bastards have hit our Base! Major!"

The thought tumbled crazily through Marrane's mind. How long ago? It could have been days, or minutes. Terror and revulsion came throbbing up into his throat and he pushed the woman away.

"Three days ago," she said, her face suddenly shut tight.

Marrane was on his feet, strapping his respirator into place. He flung open the hatch of the tank, filled with a corroding, acid hatred. He flung the woman out into the sub-zero cold ahead of him, watching the agony on her face as she gasped for breath. "Slut," he breathed. "Rotten red slut —"

He left her crumpled against a bulkhead and clattered across the steel deck. He could hear her faint voice, barely more than a whisper. "I — had — to — do — it —" And then it faded to less than a sigh and was heard no more.

— yes, she had to do it. Just as he must watch while the ground rumbled and the white-hot fireball blossomed in the camp, consuming it, vaporizing it.

The shockwave hit the Weasel and he braced himself against it. Grubich was shouting: "*We got the filthy muckers — every last rotten soul of 'em! Die, you bastards!*"

The rumbling died with surprising quickness. The dustcloud fell in the thin air. The silence came again. For what seemed a long while, Marrane stood staring at the spot where the Russki rocket had been. The last link with home? But how could he know?

— how could he ever know?

In a dull, muffled voice he gave the orders and the Task Group wheeled and took up its search formation again.

Marrane thought: — Hallerock. He might have the answer. Only a madman could give meaning to this ugliness that so briefly disfigured the icy quiet peace of this frozen land.

He opened the hatch to the navigating deck and stood rocking in the doorway. He had his answer.

Hallerock's feet hung a few inches above the deck. He swung gently to and fro with the undulating movements of the Weasel. Back and forth, to and fro, east and west —

Marrane began to laugh. Here it is at last, he thought. We've done it. Mars is ours. The flies have conquered the flypaper. The flies, oh, God —

His shoulders shook helplessly and tears streaked his cheeks. The sound of his laughter penetrated the steel flanks of the Weasel, filtered through the dust of its passing. It drifted out into the thin dry air. Past the dead of the camp, and out across the yellow-red dunes until it was silenced and lost in the thin wind that blew endlessly and forever across the face of the bitter land.

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## *Rules for an Invasion*

If you should chance to meet
A casual mutation,
Be careful that you greet
The thing with moderation.

The double-headed man
Or ninety-fingered triped
Is of the race that can
Or has replaced the biped.

LEONARD WOLF

*Clark Ashton Smith is surely the most venerable of F&SF's contributors — not so much in point of age (he was born in 1893) as in practice of his craft, for he was precociously selling tales to* The Black Cat *and* The Overland Monthly *as long ago as 1910. Since 1928 he has been contributing regularly to* Weird Tales *and sporadically to various science-fantasy magazines; and the best of his stories, especially those collected in* OUT OF SPACE AND TIME *(Arkham, 1942), are unique in their blending of horror with poetic mood . . . and often with a curious guignol humor. (See* The Weird of Avoosl Wuthoqquan *or* The Monster of the Prophecy.) *Most of Mr. Smith's horrors have been set in the infinitely remote past or the equally remote future; but his latest story — and one of his shortest and sharpest — gives a chill glimpse of horror in the future that is almost upon us.*

# *A Prophecy of Monsters*

*by* CLARK ASHTON SMITH

THE CHANGE OCCURRED before he could divest himself of more than his coat and scarf. He had only to step out of the shoes, to shed the socks with two backward kicks, and shuffle off the trousers from his lean hind-legs and belly. But he was still deep-chested after the change, and his shirt was harder to loosen. His hackles rose with rage as he slewed his head around and tore it away with hasty fangs in a flurry of falling buttons and rags. Tossing off the last irksome ribbons, he regretted his haste. Always heretofore he had been careful in regard to small details. The shirt was monogrammed. He must remember to collect all the tatters later. He could stuff them in his pockets, and wear the coat buttoned closely on his way home, when he had changed back.

Hunger snarled within him, mounting from belly to throat, from throat to mouth. It seemed that he had not eaten for a month — for a month of months. Raw butcher's meat was never fresh enough: it had known the coldness of death and refrigeration, and had lost all vital essence. Long ago there had been other meals, warm, and sauced with still-spurting blood. But now the thin memory merely served to exasperate his ravening.

Chaos raced within his brain. Inconsequently, for an instant, he recalled the first warning of his malady, preceding even the distaste for cooked

meat: the aversion, the allergy, to silver forks and spoons. It had soon extended to other objects of the same metal. He had cringed even from the touch of coinage, had been forced to use paper and refuse change. Steel, too, was a substance unfriendly to beings like him; and the time came when he could abide it little more than silver.

What made him think of such matters now, setting his teeth on edge with repugnance, choking him with something worse than nausea?

The hunger returned, demanding swift appeasement. With clumsy pads he pushed his discarded raiment under the shrubbery, hiding it from the heavy-jowled moon. It was the moon that drew the tides of madness in his blood, and compelled the metamorphosis. But it must not betray to any chance passer the garments he would need later, when he returned to human semblance after the night's hunting.

The night was warm and windless, and the woodland seemed to hold its breath. There were, he knew, other monsters abroad in that year of the Twenty-first Century. The vampire still survived, subtler and deadlier, protected by man's incredulity. And he himself was not the only lycanthrope: his brothers and sisters ranged unchallenged, preferring the darker urban jungles, while he, being country-bred, still kept the ancient ways. Moreover, there were monsters unknown as yet to myth and superstition. But these too were mostly haunters of cities. He had no wish to meet any of them. And of such meeting, surely, there was small likelihood.

He followed a crooked lane, reconnoitered previously. It was too narrow for cars and it soon became a mere path. At the path's forking he ensconced himself in the shadow of a broad, mistletoe-blotted oak. The path was used by certain late pedestrians who lived even farther out from town. One of them might come along at any moment.

Whimpering a little, with the hunger of a starved hound, he waited. He was a monster that nature had made, ready to obey nature's first commandment: *Thou shalt kill and eat.* He was a thing of terror . . . a fable whispered around prehistoric cavern-fires . . . a miscegenation allied by later myth to the powers of hell and sorcery. But in no sense was he akin to those monsters beyond nature, the spawn of a newer and blacker magic, who killed without hunger and without malevolence.

He had only minutes to wait, before his tensing ears caught the far-off vibration of footsteps. The steps came rapidly nearer, seeming to tell him much as they came. They were firm and resilient, tireless and rhythmic, telling of youth or of full maturity untouched by age. They told, surely, of a worthwhile prey; of prime lean meat and vital, abundant blood.

There was a slight froth on the lips of the one who waited. He had ceased to whimper. He crouched closer to the ground for the anticipated leap.

The path ahead was heavily shadowed. Dimly, moving fast, the walker appeared in the shadows. He seemed to be all that the watcher had surmised from the sound of his footsteps. He was tall and well-shouldered, swinging with a lithe sureness, a precision of powerful tendon and muscle. His head was a faceless blur in the gloom. He was hatless, clad in dark coat and trousers such as anyone might wear. His steps rang with the assurance of one who has nothing to fear, and has never dreamt of the couching creatures of darkness.

Now he was almost abreast of the watcher's covert. The watcher could wait no longer but sprang from his ambush of shadow, towering high upon the stranger as his hind-paws left the ground. His rush was irresistible, as always. The stranger toppled backward, sprawling and helpless, as others had done, and the assailant bent to the bare throat that gleamed more enticingly than that of a siren.

It was a strategy that had never failed . . . until now . . .

The shock, the consternation, had hurled him away from that prostrate figure and had forced him back upon teetering haunches. It was the shock, perhaps, that caused him to change again, swiftly, resuming human shape before his hour. As the change began, he spat out several broken lupine fangs; and then he was spitting human teeth.

The stranger rose to his feet, seemingly unshaken and undismayed. He came forward in a rift of revealing moonlight, stooping to a half-crouch, and flexing his beryllium-steel fingers enameled with flesh-pink.

"Who — what — are you?" quavered the werewolf.

The stranger did not bother to answer as he advanced, every synapse of the computing brain transmitting the conditioned message, translated into simplest binary terms, "Dangerous. Not human. *Kill!*"

*Despite all the technical wonders promised for his future, the essential cantankerousness of man (and woman) will never change. So, when time travel is established as a very ordinary mode of vacation journeying, you may be sure that any disappointed traveler will blame all discomforts and frustrations, not on himself, but on his travel agent!*

# *Letters from Laura*

*by* MILDRED CLINGERMAN

Monday

DEAR MOM:

Stop *worrying*. There isn't a bit of danger. Nobody ever dies or gets hurt or anything like that while time traveling. The young man at the Agency explained it all to me in detail, but I've forgotten most of it. His eyebrows move in the most fascinating way. So I'm going this weekend. I've already bought my ticket. I haven't the faintest idea where I'm going, but that's part of the fun. Grab Bag Tours, they call them. It costs $60 for one day and night, and the Agency supplies you with food concentrates and water capsules — a whole bag full of stuff they send right along with you. I certainly do *not* want Daddy to go with me. I'll tell him all about it when I get back, and then he can go himself, if he still wants to. The thing Daddy forgets is that all the history he reads is mostly just a pack of lies. Everybody says so nowadays, since time travel. He'd spoil everything arguing with the natives, telling them how they were supposed to act. I have to stop now, because the young man from the Agency is going to take me out to dinner and explain about insurance for the trip.

Love,
Laura

Tuesday

Dear Mom:

I can't *afford* to go first class. The Grab Bag Tours are not the leavings. They're perfectly all right. It's just that you sorta have to rough it. They've

been thoroughly explored. I mean somebody has been there at least once before. I never heard of a native attacking a girl traveler. Just because I won't have a guide you start worrying about that. Believe me, some of those guides from what I hear wouldn't be very safe, either. Delbert explained it all to me. He's the boy from the Agency. Did you know that insurance is a very interesting subject?

Love,

Laura

Friday

Dear Mom:

Everything is set for tomorrow. I'm so excited. I spent three hours on the couch at the Agency's office — taking the hypno-course, you know, so I'll be able to speak the language. Later Delbert broke a rule and told me my destination, so I rushed over to the public library and read bits here and there. It's ancient Crete! Dad will be so pleased. I'm going to visit the Minotaur in the Labyrinth. Delbert says he is really off the beaten track of the tourists. I like unspoiled things, don't you? The Agency has a regular little room all fixed up right inside the cave, but hidden, so as not to disturb the regular business of the place. The Agency is very particular that way. Time travelers, Delbert says, have to agree to make themselves as inconspicuous as possible. Delbert says that will be very difficult for me to do. Don't you think *subtle* compliments are the nicest? I've made myself a darling costume — I sat up late to finish it. I don't know that it's exactly right, historically, but it doesn't really matter, since I'm not supposed to leave the cave. I have to stay close to my point of arrival, you understand. Delbert says I'm well covered now with insurance, so don't worry. I'll write the minute I get back.

Love,

Laura

Friday

Dear Prue:

Tomorrow I take my first time travel tour. I wish you could see my costume. Very fetching! It's cut so that my breasts are displayed in the style of ancient Crete. A friend of mine doubts the authenticity of the dress but says the charms it shows off are *really* authentic! Next time I see you I'll lend you the pattern for the dress. But I honestly think, darling, you ought to get one of those Liff-Up operations first. I've been meaning to tell you. Of course, I don't need it myself. I'll tell you all about it (the trip I mean) when I get back.

Love,

Laura

Monday

Dear Prue:

I had the *stinkiest* time! I'll never know why I let that character at the travel agency talk me into it. The accommodations were lousy. If you want to know what I think, it's all a gyp. These Grab Bag Tours, third-class, are just the *leavings*, that they can't sell any other way. I hate salesmen. Whoever heard of ancient Crete anyway? And the Minotaur. You would certainly expect him to be a red-blooded he-man, wouldn't you? He looked like one. Not cute, you know, but built like a bull, practically. Prue, you just can't *tell* anymore. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

You've heard about that funny dizziness you feel for the first few minutes on arrival? That part is true. Everything is supposed to look black at first, but things kept on looking black even after the dizziness wore off. Then I remembered it was a cave I was in, but I did expect it to be lighted. I was lying on one of those beastly little cots that wiggle everytime your heart beats, and mine was beating plenty fast. Then I remembered the bag the Agency packs for you, and I sat up and felt around till I found it. I got out a perma-light and attached it to the solid rock wall and looked around. The floor was just plain old dirty dirt. That Agency had me stuck off in a little alcove, furnished with that sagging cot and a few coat hangers. The air in the place was rather stale. Let's be honest — it smelled. To console myself I expanded my wrist mirror and put on some more makeup. I was wearing my costume, but I had forgotten to bring a coat. I was freezing. I draped the blanket from the cot around me and went exploring. What a place! One huge room just outside my cubbyhole and corridors taking off in all directions, winding away into the dark. I had a perma-light with me, and naturally I couldn't get lost with my earrings tuned to point of arrival, but it was *weird* wandering around all by myself. I discovered that the corridor I was in curved downward. Later I found there were dozens of levels in the Labyrinth. Very confusing.

I was just turning to go back when something reached out and grabbed for me, from one of those alcoves. I was *thrilled*. I flicked off the light, dropped my blanket, and ran.

From behind I heard a man's voice. "All right, sis, we'll play games."

Well, Prue, I hadn't played hide-and-seek in years, (except once or twice at office parties) but I was still pretty good at it. That part was fun. After a time my eyes adjusted to the dark so that I could see well enough to keep from banging into the walls. Sometimes I'd deliberately make a lot of noise to keep things interesting. But do you know what? That character would blunder right by me, and way down at the end of the corridor he'd

make noises like "Oho" or "Aha." Frankly, I got discouraged. Finally I heard him grumbling his way back in my direction. I knew the dope would never catch me, so I just stepped out in front of him and said "Wellll?" You know, in that drawly, sarcastic way I have.

He reached out and grabbed me, and then he staggered back — like you've seen actors do in those old, old movies. He kept pounding his forehead with his fist, and then he yelled, "Cheated! Cheated again!" I almost slapped him. Instead I snapped on my perma-light and let him look me over good.

"Well, Buster," I said very coldly, "what do you mean, cheated?"

He grinned at me and shaded his eyes from the light. "Darling," he said, "you look luscious, indeed, but what the hell are you doing here?"

"I'm sight-seeing," I said. "Are you one of the sights?"

"Listen, baby, I *am* the sight. Meet the Minotaur." He stuck out this huge paw, and I shook it.

"Who did you think I was?" I asked him.

"Not *who*, but *what*," he said. "Baby, you ain't no virgin."

Well, Prue, really. How can you argue a thing like that? He was completely *wrong*, of course, but I simply refused to discuss it.

"I only gobble virgins," he said.

Then he led me down into his rooms, which were really quite comfortable. I couldn't forgive the Agency for that cot, so when I spied his lovely, soft couch draped in pale blue satin, I said, "I'll borrow that if you don't mind."

"It's all yours, kid," the Minotaur said. He meant it, too. You remember how pale blue is one of my best colors? There I was lolling on the couch, looking like the Queen of the Nile, flapping my eyelashes, and what does this churl want to do?

"I'm simply starved for talk," he says. And about what? Prue, when a working girl spends her hard-earned savings on time travel, she has a right to expect something besides *politics*. I've heard there are men, a few shy ones, who will talk very fast to you about science and all that highbrow stuff, hoping maybe you won't notice some of the things they're doing in the *meantime*. But not the Minotaur. Who cares about the government a room's length apart? Lying there, twiddling my fingers and yawning, I tried to remember if Daddy had ever mentioned anything about the Minotaur's being so persnickety. That's the trouble with books. They leave out all the important details.

For instance, did you know that at midnight every night the Minotaur makes a grand tour of the Labyrinth? He wouldn't let me go along. That's another thing. He just says "no" and grins and means it. Now isn't that a typical male trait? I thought so, and when he locked me in his rooms the

evening looked like turning into fun. I waited for him to come back with bated breath. But you can't bate your breath forever, and he was gone hours. When he did come back I'd fallen asleep and he woke me up *belching*.

"Please," I said, "Do you have to do that?"

"Sorry, kid," he said. "It's these gaunt old maids. Awful souring to the stomach." It seems this windy diet was one of the things wrong with the government. He was very bitter about it all. Tender virgins, he said, had always been in short supply and now he was out of favor with the new regime. I rummaged around in my wrist bag and found an anti-acid pill. He was delighted. Can you imagine going into a transport over pills?

"Any cute males ever find their way into this place?" I asked him. I got up and walked around. You can loll on a couch just so long, you know.

"No boys!" The Minotaur jumped up and shook his fist at me. I cowered behind some hangings, but I needn't have bothered. He didn't even jerk me out from behind them. Instead he paced up and down and raved about the lies told on him. He swore he'd never eaten boys — hadn't cared for them at all. That creep, Theseus, was trying to ruin him politically. "I've worn myself thin," he yelled, "in all these years of service —" At that point I walked over and poked him in his big, fat stomach. Then I gathered my things together and walked out.

He puffed along behind me wanting to know what was the matter. "Gee, kid," he kept saying, "don't go home mad." I didn't say goodbye to him at all. A spider fell on him and it threw him into a hissy. The last I saw of him he was cursing the government because they hadn't sent him an exterminator.

Well, Prue, so much for the bogey man. Time travel in the raw!

Love,
Laura

Monday

Dear Mom:

Ancient Crete was nothing but politics, not a bit exciting. You didn't have a single cause to worry. Those people are just as particular about girls as you are.

Love,
Laura

Tuesday

Dear Mr. Delbert Barnes:

Stop calling me or I will complain to your boss. You cad. I see it all now. You and your fine talk about how your Agency "fully protects its clients."

That's a very high-sounding name for it. Tell me, how many girls do you talk into going to ancient Crete? And do you provide all of them with the same kind of insurance? Mr. Barnes, I don't want any more insurance from you. But I'm going to send you a client for that trip — the haggiest old maid I know. She has buck teeth and whiskers. Insure *her.*

Laura

P. S. Just in case you're feeling smug about me, put this in your pipe and smoke it. The Minotaur *knew*, I can't imagine how, but *you*, Mr. Barnes, *are no Minotaur.*

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*"Evolution, I suppose you'd call it."*

*Reproduced from PUNCH, December 9, 1953*

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